Buddhism in Britain - development and adaptation.

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Abstract

Up until the mid half of the present century Buddhist institutions in Britain were exceedingly limited in scope and number. Subsequently a variety of indigenous Buddhist movements have emerged, each with a particular doctrinal exegesis and organisational form. This work is an ethnography of two of them - the British Theravada Forest Sangha and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. The former consists of monastics and lay supporters, the second is entirely a lay movement. The British Forest Sangha has strong links with hermitage monasteries in the forests of north-east Thailand, founded under the spiritual guidance of meditation master, Ajahn Chah. The FWBO selectively draws on a variety of Buddhist traditions to foster what it calls the Ekayāna (One Way). Characteristically syncretic, the FWBO also calls on elements of modern European thought, particularly gestalt psychology and evolutionary theory.

As a means towards accounting for their continuous growth throughout the nineteen eighties the genesis of both movements is portrayed, along with the relevant historical background. The public face of both movements is examined and their styles of organisation and recruitment analysed with special attention to symbolic content.

The complex dynamics of cross-cultural processes form a major theoretical concern of the thesis. In the transmission of Buddhism under modern conditions it is possible to trace contingent patterns that flow in both directions between Asian and Western cultures as they interact. The centrality of meditation as a practice for Buddhists in the West combined with the recent history of meditation in South East Asia serves as one of several illustrations of these processes. The second related theoretical concern applies to specific Western adaptations of traditional Asian forms, in particular the monastic Sangha. Attention is focussed on those negotiations between monks and lay people which are necessary to facilitate adaptation to the British context, while simultaneously avoiding serious transgressions of orthopraxy.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

For the first five decades of the present century being a Buddhist in Britain presented few options. Some people carried on alone, usually with the help of books, as very few local Buddhist groups remained active. The alternative was to join the Buddhist Society with its headquarters in the capital. For those living in or close to London there were opportunities to attend the society's programme of classes and lectures. Members living further afield had the benefit of subscribing to the society's journal and access to its publications. With its portalled headquarters in Ecclestone Square, its well endowed library and a long term president in the person of Christmas Humphreys, a senior member of the judiciary, the Buddhist Society had about it the air of an august intellectual club.

By the 1970s the picture was transformed by growing numbers of groups across the country representing a range of interpretations and schools of Buddhism. At the same time the Buddhist Society continued, enlivened by the altered scene of which it was now just a part. The style and extent of change is charted in the early chapters of this work. Its most notable features were the widespread commitment being made to Buddhist practice - as opposed to the previous intellectual tendency - and the development of a related social dimension. An indigenous Sangha obtained a firm foundation and many Buddhist centres were established. Although the relatively small numbers of Asian Buddhists

living in this country did contribute support to numbers of these new ventures, the impetus came largely from British people without family connections in Asia.

The 1983 Buddhist Directory for Britain lists 107 societies, groups public centres and residential communities. By 1987 there were 44 centres, 105 societies and groups and 16 monasteries and temples. [1] The latest Buddhist Directory, currently in press is likely to demonstrate a further increase in these numbers.

In order to study the social dimension of Buddhism in contemporary Britain I chose to focus on two distinct movements. The majority of the time that I have spent within a Buddhist movement has been in and around the cluster of Theravada monasteries attached to the lineage of the Thai meditation master, Ajahn Chah. The total of four monasteries are under the spiritual guidance of Ajahn Chah's appointee, Ajahn Sumedho. He is an American monk with over twenty years experience of strict adherence to the monks' discipline as outlined in the Vinaya Piṭaka of the Pali canon.

The essential code by which the monks abide is contained in a set of 227 rules known as the pāṭimokkha that are to be found in the sutta-vibhaṅga portion of the Vinaya Piṭaka. The Vinaya Piṭaka is presently thought to have been completed in its entirety by the middle of the fourth century B.C. Theravada Buddhists regard the monks' code as having been laid down by the Buddha.

Two of the major principles of the Vinaya that most obviously determine the shape of the monks' order, the

bhikkhu-saṅgha, and its relations with lay people are the prescription for absolute celibacy and for the withdrawal from networks of economic production. The Vinaya forbids the acceptance of money or causing others to accept it. Nor are monks allowed to till the soil, so they cannot farm in order to feed themselves. As mendicants the monks must be fed, clothed and sheltered by means of donations from lay people.

In 1990 the British Forest Sangha consisted of thirty four monks, fifteen nuns and fifteen novices who inhabit four monasteries. One, Amaravati in Hertfordshire, is by far the largest and acts as a centre for lay peoples' retreats. Chithurst, the first of the new monasteries, is now regarded primarily as a training monastery. The two small "local" monasteries at Harnham in Northumberland and Honiton in Devon have fewer monks and no nuns as they do not include suitable separate accommodation.

I was first introduced to the British Forest Sangha during the early part of the nineteen eighties, while living and studying in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I began field-work for this doctoral thesis in October 1985. By living with my family in Durham City I was able to sustain periods of regular contact with the monks at Harnham and with local lay supporters. I made several visits to Amaravati, but only one brief visit to Chithurst. One reason why the Theravadins came to prominence in this study is to do with location and ease of access. Another may be that I was already familiar with the Theravada milieu at the outset of the research and had a previously established set of contacts. This was not

the position concerning my second movement, The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.

I had encountered the FWBO in East Anglia during the 1970s, but only in passing, and I knew scarcely anyone who was a member. Nevertheless the style of their presence in the city of Norwich interested me. What persuaded me to study their movement, alongside the Theravadins, was the diametrically opposed perspectives they adopt over the relevance of monasticism to the spread of Buddhism to the West. It goes without saying that the Forest Sangha place their faith in the monastic tradition. Ajahn Sumedho is fond of saying that people who want to escape from "the fires" of greed, anger and delusion should send for the "fire brigade", the monastic Sangha. The FWBO, however, is a totally lay organisation. The Western Buddhist Order is a lay religious order and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order embraces both the Order Members as well as those who share similar ideals and aspire to ordination. The FWBO then consists of Order Members and non-Order members. The WBO consists only of those who have been admitted to the Order.

The FWBO was founded in 1968 and the WBO in 1969 by Sangharakshita, an Englishman who had previously spent many years in India as a Buddhist monk, although for most of that time he did not dwell in a Theravada monastery. Instead he travelled and spent long periods at a Young Men's Buddhist Centre he founded in Kalimpong, close to the Tibetan border in north east India. Sangharakshita was initially ordained into the Theravada tradition and later took initiation into

Tibetan Vajrayāna practices passed from master to pupil. Sangharakshita's particular interpretation of Buddhist teaching and practice form the basis of the FWBO's doctrinal position.

I visited FWBO centres in Norwich , London, Croydon, Bristol, Cambridge and Surlingham in Norfolk for short periods and the level of participant observation that I was able to undertake, although useful, cannot compare with the more consistent pattern that has applied to my work with the Theravadins.

During the course of the research I carried out a number of formal interviews with members of both movements. Among the Theravadins this involved taped interviews of between one and half to two and a half hours duration with eight monastics, one lay person recently disrobed after five years as a monk and eleven lay persons. These were transcribed verbatum. In addition I carried out a series of six interviews with lay people through lengthy correspondence lasting for a year or more, resulting in detailed documentation. A total of twenty nine taped interviews were carried out with members of the FWBO and WBO and six formal interviews were carried out taking notes.

I tried to overcome the methodological imbalance between my treatment of the FWBO compared to the Theravadins by interviewing additional numbers, making a total of thirty five formal interviews compared with twenty six Theravadins. Sangharakshita's prolific writings and those of Dharmachari Subhuti and other Order Members have also been an important

source. It is however my view that these factors do not fully compensate for the extra amount of time that I was able to spend with Theravada Buddhists. Extended participant observation and regular contact are, after all, central to the ethnographic enterprise. Nevertheless, I would submit that the material presented here on the FWBO provides a solid beginning for further research. Moreover the comparative analysis helped to shape my understanding of the Theravadins. The historical material contained in Chapters One and Two is relevant to both Buddhist movements, for Sangharakshita is a former incumbent of the Vihara at Hampstead when he was supported by the English Sangha Trust. It was some time later that the English Sangha Trust invited Ajahn Sumedho and his companions to take up residence, and it was after the break with the English Sangha Trust that Sangharakshita founded the FWBO.

In Chapter Three I trace the genesis of the British Forest Sangha to the forests of North East Thailand, and seek to explain how the strong links that were forged with Thailand helped the E.S.T. to finally achieve its aim of establishing a stable monastic Sangha in Britain. Chapter Four is an account of the FWBO's ethos as revealed in its organisational and ideological aspects; a theme continued through Chapter Five, where the public face of both Buddhist movements is examined and their styles of recruitment analysed.

Chapter Six deals with the widespread teaching and practice of meditation which is central to an understanding

of Buddhism in the West. Here I try to show the link between the growth of meditation practice among lay people in Asia and the stimulus it provided for the transmission of Buddhism in the British context. Chapter Seven attempts to understand the mutual negotiations between the monastic Sangha and its lay supporters. These negotiations are, I suggest, required to determine the precise nature of their relations in a non-Theravada Buddhist environment and signify the beginnings of a Western form of the Theravada. Innovations regarding the role of women in the monastic Sangha are discussed in Chapter Eight, where I also examine the important part that women have played as lay supporters as well as the place of women in the FWBO. Chapter Nine sets out the wider social agenda adopted by both movements and the means by which it is implemented. My conclusions are drawn together in Chapter Ten through a comparative analysis of implicit meanings, revealed through language and other communicative strategies, as they emerge in both movements.

Throughout I have used the Pali term dhamma signifying the teaching of the Buddha when discussing the Theravada. The Sanskrit equivalent dharma appears when related to the FWBO. In this way my own usage is consistent with that of my informants.

There are many people to thank for their assistance in this project, notably all those Buddhists who made time to talk to me, and the scholars on whose insights I have drawn. In addition to his learning, my supervisor, Dr. Michael Carrithers lent me good cheer in the face of obstacles both

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CHAPTER ONE

CROSSING BORDERS

The unfolding of profound political and social changes in the Theravada Countries of South and South East Asia that will be sketched in this Chapter led to the appearance of what Winston King refers to as "export Buddhism". [1] In appropriating King's term I intend to extend its use. King is talking about "treatments, translations and selections by notable scholars and by those presenting Buddhist teachings to the West for various purposes." [2] He argues that Buddhists themselves have not, until recently, been agents in exploiting their own product: most of it has been done by Westerners. [3] But while it is true that Westerners did make numerous translations and write a compendium of works on Buddhism, as will be illustrated, they did so with the assistance of Buddhist scholars, both monks and laymen, and Indian scholars also participated in Pali studies. [4]

The story of the introduction of Buddhist institutions and practices into Britain features active collaboration between Britons and Asian Buddhists, collectively and individually. Moreover, such collaboration was present from the outset and continues up to the present. In South East Asia members of the colonial service and European travellers learnt about Buddhism from local people, usually monks who were themselves caught up in an era of revival and reforms.

Back in Britain admiration for Buddhist principles and teachings reached populist proportions. Knowledged of this

boosted the confidence of Sri Lankan Buddhists previously undermined by the disestablishment of their religion and the animosity of Christians missionaries. Re-examining their religious texts in the light of new ideas introduced by the European conquerers, Buddhists began to equate their own doctrines with Western rationalism and humanism, coincidentally making them more accessible to interested Westerners, and initiating the reciprocal processes detailed in ensuing sections of this chapter.

As time went on Asian Buddhists such as the Sri Lankan Anagarika Dharmapala and the Burmese judge U Chan Htoon wrote books and articles in English, and delivered addresses to international gatherings across continents. The intention of such advocates for Buddhism was to present it as a highly rational system, "valid for all time all situations and all men ..." [5] Proponents of "export Buddhism" and translators of Buddhist texts have also included a number of Europeans who, having ordained as Buddhist monks, continued to live in Theravada countries as highly respected members of the religious establishment; such were the English bhikkhu Nanamoli (Osbert Moore), the German Nyanatiloka (Anton Gueth) and his pupil and fellow countryman Nyanaponika (Siegmund Feniger) who founded the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy in 1958.

"Export Buddhism" was partly created and propounded by Buddhists in their own lands where the universalistic tendency referred to by U Htoon had been unearthed and revitalised. Some of the authors to whom I will refer have

provided us with excellent accounts of the reception that Buddhism received in nineteenth century Britain and how it was reconstructed to accord with current moral and philosophical preoccupations. My concern is to add the important point that Asians were not a passive source from whom Buddhism was "borrowed," or even "plundered," but equal and active participants in a two-way process.

Sri Lanka

The Buddhist religion (sāsana) in Sri Lanka was profoundly affected by colonialism, and especially by the increased pressure from Christian missionaries during the period of British rule. It was also during this period that Buddhism was effectively disestablished as a national religion. The collapse of traditional royal patronage meant that the Sri Lankan monastic order (bhikkhu-saṅgha) had to learn to manage its own affairs without the support of the state and to become more directly dependent on the ordinary laity [6].

Developments within the bhikkhu-saṅgha led to the rise of new fraternities (nikāya) rejecting the unwritten tradition that ordination was open only to members of the high caste, the goyigama [7]. These new fraternities were reformist and revivalist; reformist in the sense that there was an emphasis on asceticism, revivalist in that increased dependence upon the laity brought the monks into closer involvement with the social environment. The revivalist spirit contained an awareness of threats to Buddhism posed by

Christianity, but it was to be several decades before the Buddhists engaged the vociferous, antagonistic and highly organised missionaries in polemical arguments during the latter half of the nineteenth century [8].

In the earlier period Christian missionaries were met with kindness, hospitality and forbearance from monks and villagers when, as itinerant preachers, they travelled from village to village. But even this was used by the missionaries as evidence that Buddhism was truly the devil's brew. In the mid-nineteenth century Spence Hardy declared the lack of "enmity" shown to him by the monks to be symptomatic of "carelessness and indifference" towards matters of religion [9]. As in India Christian missionary activities in Sri Lanka were divided into three broad fronts namely, education; the production and distribution of literature; and preaching.

An underlying assumption behind their combined methods was the belief held by the missionaries that assimilation of Western culture in broad terms would lead to an appreciation of its superior merits, and hence to the inevitable acceptance of the Christian spiritual and ethical values to which it was attached. The weakness of the missionaries' position lay partly in over-dependence on what was, in fact, a false premise. In reality Protestant Christianity was under pressure in its own environs, and after a long lapse, an awareness of the precise situation dawned upon Buddhists suffering under the bellicose attacks of the missionaries. Those who first began to make use of Christianity's domestic

malaise as a weapon against its proponents in Sri Lanka came from the section of the population that had been most exposed to the wider spectrum of Western culture. Ironically, exposure took place largely in the field of education where the British missionaries played a leading role by establishing schools.

Tissa Fernando has pointed out that although parts of Sri Lanka had been under Western rule since the early sixteenth century, educated elites began to emerge only during the British period. Other changes that took place during the British period and contributed to the emergence of elites were economic shifts brought about through the development of a plantation economy and the growth of urban centres [10]. It was recognised by rulers and ruled alike that

> "...so far as the educational needs of laymen were concerned Christian schools alone with their more modern curricula, English education, and formal and informal contacts with the administration, had the capacity to provide laymen with secure avenues of secular advancement."

The second strong arm of missionary strategy was the printing press. Here the Christians in Sri Lanka went unchallenged for four decades, in contrast to the sub-continent where the Hindu reformer, Ram Mohan Roy, made early and effective use of the presses to challenge the missionaries' negative assertions [12]. Initially it was the traditional elite families, the goyigama aristocrats who took advantage of educational opportunities, but as the nineteenth

century progressed an increasing proportion of non-goyigama children attended English schools

> "with the result that by the turn of the century the lower castes came to constitute a substantial portion of the new elite." [13]

It was possible for individuals to support the building of mission schools with one hand and the Buddhist Sangha with the other, because Sri Lankans did not consider allegiance to one as a root and branch rejection of the other [14]. Consequently there came into being a class of English educated, informed lay Buddhists, better equipped and better positioned to play the missionaries at their own game and to lend support to the Sangha. They also supplied a new kind of recruit to the Sangha, thus transforming attitudes from within.

What eventually roused the Buddhists to action was not the belligerent tone of the Christian pamphleteers, whose ignorance of Buddhism was as bottomless as their lexicon of invective, but a text advocating Christianity by appealing to reason rather than emotion. Kristyāni Prajñapti (The Evidence and Doctrine of the Christian Religion) was originally published in 1849, and again in an enlarged form in 1861 by Daniel Gogerly. Gogerly's book stimulated a genuine intellectual dialogue between the Christians and the Buddhists. Bhikkhu Mohottivatte Gunananda initiated the debate in print, culminating with a two day open air debate in front of a large audience at Panadure. The Christian case was led by a Sri Lankan born minister, David de Silva, and the Buddhists by Mohottivatte Gunananda, who gave an

impressive performance. The outcome was hailed as a victory by the Buddhists, despite the fact that the Christians were not prepared to concede any ground. [15]

Lay supporters attended the public debate in large numbers, helped finance the new Buddhist presses and consumed the publications that they issued. During the 1860s there was a growing awareness that, in the absence of a central political authority working for the welfare of Buddhism at a national level, the laity had to extend their own support for the sāsana beyond the traditional provision of requisites for the monks at their local viharas. [16]

The upsurge in confidence among the Buddhists in combating the incursions of Christianity following the Panadure debate was reinforced by a growing perception that Christianity was being attacked on its home ground. The writings of Charles Bradlaugh and others were eagerly received in Sri Lanka, and at around the same time sympathy for Buddhism began to gain ground in Europe. A colourful example were the Theosophists. The arrival of Theosophy's founders Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott in Sri Lanka in 1880 shifted the nascent Buddhist resurgence into fully fledged revivalism.

Olcott's greatest service to the Buddhists of Sri Lanka was to point out the marked discrepancy between the number of Christian schools on the island compared to the number of Buddhist schools. He inaugurated a Buddhist National Fund for the promotion of religious and secular education of Buddhist children and the dissemination of Buddhist literature [17]. He and Blavatsky also founded the Buddhist

Theosophical Society with two divisions, one lay, one monastic. The latter never became the focus of achievement, because the monks were already organised into their fraternities within the Sangha. In contrast the laity were able to take full advantage of the innovation that brought them together within a unified organisational structure run by committees [18].

It was this milieu that nurtured Olcott's earnest young Sri Lankan protege, David Hewavitarne. On coming under the influence of Theosophy in 1884, Hewavitarne shed his Western name and adopted the Pali name of Dharmapala, meaning "guardian of the doctrine." He became celibate and announced himself to be a "homeless one", an anagarika, a term reserved in the Pali texts for monks. Writing about Dharmapala's successful innovation in creating a new role that bridged the shrinking distance between monks and laity the Sri Lankan anthropologist, Gananath Obeyesekere, states:

> "If ideally the symbol of the monk represents world renunciation and the layman world involvement, the anagarika represents an attempt to renounce the world while living in the world." [19]

Obeyesekere regards Dharmapala as the symbol and instigator of a Protestant form of Theravada Buddhism, in the sense that it was both a protest against the missionaries and a borrowing of the Protestant Christian modus operandi. However, despite it modernism the Buddhism popularised by Dharmapala had deep roots in orthodox classical Theravada tradition [20]. The major difference was his insistence that the Eightfold Path to Enlightenment was meant as much

for laymen as for monks, and that technical progress and modern economic methods could be pursued and guided by Buddhist ethical norms [21]. It was a version of the "pure" Buddhism that drew admirers in the West, and Dharmapala enjoyed much success during his many visits abroad. He visited England four times and the U.S.A. five times. In 1925 he arrived in England to found a branch of his international Maha Bodhi Society in London. A year later a centre was opened in Ealing where meetings were held and a journal, The British Buddhist, was launched.

Dharmapala's biography is a living example of the universalistic and the particularistic strands in Theravada Buddhism. He was at once fiery advocate of Sri Lankan nationalism under the Buddhist banner and an ambassador for Buddhism to the furthest corners of the globe.

Thailand

Thailand was the only country in South East Asia not to be incorporated into one of the European colonial empires. Although, by the end of the nineteenth century Thailand was economically a client state of Great Britain and remained such until the Second World War [22]. Consequently, although Thailand retained political sovereignty it did not escape exposure to new economic forces and was as "radically affected by the influence of the colonial period as were its neighbours." [23] The crucial difference between the Thai experience and that of Sri Lanka and Burma during the

colonial period was the preservation of the institution of sacral kingship.

Even in pre-modern times the Thai kings were in a position to

> "take the leadership in introducing new innovations and domesticating new elements which intruded from beyond the limits of the culture itself." [24]

The presently reigning Cakri dynasty was founded by Rama I, following a bitter struggle after the fall of the previous Ayutthaya kingdom in 1767. He and his descendants were noted reformers of religious affairs [25].

During the first two years of his rule Rama I issued a total of seven royal edicts pertaining to religious affairs, many containing prescriptions that remain operative today. One decree issued in 1783 ordered that each monk should be attached to a particular monastery and be under the direct supervision of a qualified monk acting as a preceptor [26]. Rama's directive is responsible for the fact that the Abbot of the British Theravada Sangha, Ajahn Sumedho, having ordained as a monk in Thailand, was unable to perform ordinations in Britain until he had received permission from his Thai teacher to act as a preceptor (upajjhāya). The monks ordained by Ajahn Sumedho must acknowledge him as their preceptor.

The power of the Thai monarchy increased from around the period 1851, when the fourth Cakri ruler King Mongkut ascended the throne, up until 1910. There was, however, an intensification of colonial influence around 1880. In 1855 the Bowring Treaty with Britain was signed, opening Thailand

to expansion in rice agriculture, increased rice exports, colonization of new land and a growth in commerce [27]. The economy was expanded and monetarized and corvee labour obligations declined and were replaced by wage labour [28]. It was crucial to the subsequent history of Thailand that Mongkut, who had been a leading bhikkhu for twenty seven years prior to his ascension, was able to exploit the pinnacle of status that the role of king came to represent by building on the reforming activities of Rama I.

The success of Rama's policies was partly due to his appeal to an idealised Ayutthaya culture, achieved by the king's enactment of cosmic calendrical rites based on cosmological notions embedded in a Thai Buddhist text known as the _Traibhūmi_ [29]. It was therefore a measure of the inner strength of the dynasty when King Mongkut was able to initiate reforms that rejected much of the _Traibhūmi_, and facilitated the absorption of new ideas from the West, at least within the limited milieu of the Thai elite.

The king argued that cosmography had to accord with empirical knowledge and rejected everything in religion that claimed a "supernatural origin". He denied the existence of heavens and hells. At least some of the lay elite, together with the king's monk followers, shared his desire to strip away "accretions" and "superstitions". The key document supporting the reforms was _Kitchanukit_, a "book explaining many things," published in 1867 under the authorship of Thiphakorawong, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Although it was widely believed that the true author was Mongkut himself. [30]

Natural phenomenon such as earthquakes, comets and eclipses were accounted for in the pages of Kitchanukit by scientific explanations drawn from meteorology, geology and astronomy. In contrast to the explanations of the Traibhūmi, the etiology of disease was given an environmental rather than moral content, but Buddhist principles were retained to explain social and ethical matters. Fundamental doctrines of Theravada such as karma, the theory of merit, rebirth and the Five Precepts were reaffirmed. [31]

According to Craig Reynolds, the book's dialectical exchanges represent the product of changes that had already taken place in Thai society, and that they "were part of a larger process that would involve every institution as the century progressed." [32]

The nineteenth century reforms were spearheaded from above, but in the 1930s, when the educated commoner began to participate in politics, and laymen became more involved with religious issues, they remained preoccupied with the confrontation between Buddhism and scientific rationalism and the question of Buddhism's applicability to modern life. [33] What is instructive to note for the purposes of this thesis is how changes in Thai society resulted in a similar outcome for Buddhism as did those in Sri Lanka, despite the differences in social and political conditions. Tambiah identifies this outcome as

> "...an accent on scipturalism (on practising the true unadulterated religion as revealed by close study of the canonical texts) combined with an activist impulse to carry the religion to the masses." [34]

In both Theravada cultures discussed so far it is possible to identify a strong tendency to attempt to reconcile Buddhism with Western scientific principles, and to stress the rational nature of classical orthodoxy. Ames describes it thus:

> "The emphasis is placed upon reasoning and a cognitive rather than an emotional attitude towards the world. Modern reformers identify Buddhism with science and the scientific method: both are said to be based on research and experiment, the one introspective or subjective and the other objective. It is even suggested that Buddhism made many scientific discoveries long before Western science did." [35]

Burma

Many of the features of Buddhist modernism which have been outlined for Sri Lanka and Thailand can equally be traced in the history of colonial and post-colonial Burma, particularly the growing importance of the role of the laity, secular education and the link between religious revivalism and nationalism. [36]

In the Burmese Sangha sectarianism had always existed, but was exacerbated by the disestablishment of Buddhism and the withdrawal of state patronage [37]. Some monks joined the laity in the nationalist movement, particularly with the activities of the Young Men's Buddhist Association. The Y.M.B.A. was founded at Arakan in 1902 in emulation of the Christian Y.M.C.A. and a branch was established in Rangoon in 1906. (Such a society had been in existence in Sri Lanka since 1898.)

Ostensibly the aims of the society were religious. Its members were drawn from professional men belonging to the emergent elite who had undergone a secular Western style education. About half were government officials [38]. Y.M.B.A. discussions tended to centre around social and political issues [39]. Those who became "political monks" organised associations of their own, such as the General Council of Monkhood Association, founded in 1922 [40]. A political offshoot of the Y.M.B.A. was the General Council of Burmese Associations which Sarkisyanz describes as "close to the traditional people" and "prepared to co-operate with political monks." [41]

All this led to political monks working alongside secular nationalist leaders who had been strongly influenced by socialist thought, and to an attempt to create a Buddhism that " stressed the importance of reducing suffering not only for the individual but for the whole society." [42]

The new setting

The change in modes of thought and organisational practice outlined in the previous pages resulted in Theravada Buddhism becoming more attractive and accessible to the Western mind. I intend now to examine how involvement with Buddhism by some groups and individuals in the West developed; and to demonstrate how their interest worked to encourage innovative processes in the indigenous setting.

At the middle of the nineteenth century Buddhism was not a serious contender for European converts, but the interest that was shown in its beliefs and practices was an indication of the sense of religious pluralism which was beginning to emerge [43].

Clausen argues that the view that Europeans in the mid-Victorian period had no knowledge of, and little interest in, the culture and religions of Asia is erroneous [44]. Phlip Almond arrives at a similar conclusion stating that during the latter part of the nineteenth century, especially in Victorian England, "the Buddha met with almost universal acclaim." [45]

According to Clausen:

> "While the interest had been growing for 100 years, however the knowledge was mostly of recent origin and dated from the discovery by European scholars, in roughly the second quarter of the nineteenth century, of voluminous Buddhist religious texts in Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia and Ceylon. Within a remarkably short time enough of this material had been translated, or made the basis of books about Buddhism, to create, if not satisfy, an interest which soon spread beyond the circle of professional philogists and orientalists." [46]

In Britain many of the early books on Buddhism were written by Christian missionaries who had been resident in Buddhist countries, and had studied the alien faith as part of their efforts to combat it. Clausen cites two particular authors as providing "real scholarly contributions to the subject" namely Samuel Beal and Spence Hardy.

Samuel Beal wrote the Romantic Legend of Sakya Buddha, a translation the Abhiniṣkramana Sutra in 1875 and Buddhism in China in 1884. Spence Hardy published Eastern Monachism 1850; A Manual of Buddhism In Its Modern Development, 1853 and The Legends and Theories of the Buddhists, 1866. The manual was written so that future missionaries might know their quarry. In it he paid tribute to Buddhism's moral system. Although its "good points remained incidental; it was after all had been said in its favour, a form of heathenism, not to be compared with the Christian revelation which was destined to replace it." [47] Nevertheless, the writings of the missionaries did help to popularise in Britain the religion they were working to supplant in the East. [48]

Clausen bases his contention that Buddhism interested the general reader on the number of articles that appeared in non-specialist magazines during the 1860s and 70s, counting articles from Macmillans, The Westminster Review and The Cornhill Magazine.[49]

In the second half of the century scholars of Indian religion embarked on a long drawn out controversy centred on disagreements about the meaning of the Buddhist religious goal of nirvana. Some thought that nirvana meant complete extinction, others thought it meant something else. Although much of the discussion entailed arcane scholastic references, the controversy took hold beyond the groves of academe and in 1857 reached the columns of The Times newspaper. The accusations of annihilationism became standard ammunition for those who opposed Buddhism. However Buddhism had its defenders. Those who protested against the charges were inclined to elevate the moral and ethical qualities of the Buddha's teaching. The famous indologist Max Muller described the Buddhist moral code as " one of the most perfect which the world has ever known." [50]

The nirvana controversy dragged on so that even in the twentieth century Western Buddhists were defending themselves against the charge of nihilism [51]. The intensity of the argument cooled with the publication in 1877 of an article by T.W. Rhys-Davids in The Contemporary Review [52]. He defined nirvana as "the going out" and claimed that it represented

> ".....the disappearance of that sinful, yearning, grasping condition of mind and heart which would otherwise, according to the great

> mystery of Karma, be the cause of renewed individual existence....Nirvana is therefore a moral condition....and if translated at all be best rendered HOLINESS....that is in the Buddhist sense - perfect peace, goodness and wisdom."

Rhys-Davids thus linked the concept of nirvana to the ethical tenets of Buddhism which were generally admired. The moral interpretation appealed to popular sentiment and placed Buddhism in "an altogether more favourable light for the Victorian reader." [53]

In the same year as the article in the Contemporary Review, Rhys-Davids popular book Buddhism: Being a Sketch of The Life an Teachings of Gautama the Buddha was published and together book and article prepared the ground for the extraordinary acclaim surrounding the publication of Edwin Arnold's The Light of Asia in 1879. By 1970 there had been a total of sixty British editions of Arnold's epic poem and eighty American editions.[54]

Clausen gives several reasons why Buddhism held such a attraction for the late Victorian "student who was looking to non-Christian cultures for some inspiration to satisfy his own post-Darwinian needs." [55] In the first place Buddhism was agnostic and "there was little that the disciple was asked to take on faith." The Buddha had told his disciples to test everything for themselves. This provided a strong appeal for anyone who had rejected Christianity on the grounds of its authoritarianism and incompatibility with science [56]. Second, the translation of dharma as law, a convention followed by Victorian writers, led the scientific reader to assume that Buddhism "accepted the rule of natural

law to a greater extent than Christianity." [57] The way in which Buddhism presented a theoretical structure whereby everything worked itself out inexorably over a period of time, without the intervention of a deity, was consistent with the approach of evolutionary theory. Third, Buddhism represented a religion of self-help, the course of salvation was up to the individual and great emphasis was placed on morality. Black describes the notion of self-help as

> "a promontory by which we recognise the Victorian landscape. At worst it is a set of platitudes; at best it reflects the ethical assumptions of the new society." [58]

Its greatest proponent was Samuel Smiles (1812-1904) who preached a "secularised evangelism" with his message of success through one's own efforts. Smiles book, Self-Help, first published in 1859, sold a quarter of a million copies during his lifetime. [59]

Fourthly, Clausen stresses the fact that Buddhism had an attractive founder saying it is a point not to be under-estimated when trying to understand the appeal that Buddhism held in Victorian England and America. He associates the figure of the Buddha with the "wistful nostalgia" that many agnostics held for the figure of Jesus [60]. Furthermore, the Buddha had been associated in the writings of Max Muller with Martin Luther. Muller represented the Buddha as a kind of Luther who had purged the superstitions of the Brahmin priesthood in his time. Buddhism could thus be viewed as the Protestantism of Asia. [61]

Books were the main source of information about Buddhism in Victorian Society and the production of books suitable for the general reader depended on authors having access to primary texts. We have seen how a spate of translations of Buddhist texts in the first quarter of the nineteenth century prompted the production of more accessible literature and stimulated interest in Buddhism. A second wave of literature lasting into the twentieth cenntury was to be sustained by the numerous translations produced by the Pali Text Society, founded in 1881 by Prof. Rhys-Davids.

Rhys-Davids had studied Sanskrit at the University of Breslau, after which he entered the Civil Service and became competent in Tamil and Sinhalese. These languages he acquired not so much for the sake of scholarship, but as practical aids to his work as a colonial administrator. Rhys-Davids turned to learning Pali after a Pali sacred text that no one present could read was produced in court as a piece of evidence [62]. For this purpose he engaged a Buddhist monk named Yatramulle, of whom he said in his 1881 Hibbert Lecture:

> "There was an indescribable attraction, a high mindedness that filled me with reverence." [63]

The first committee of the Pali Text Society included orientalists such as Emile Senart, Hermann Oldenberg and Richard Morris [64]. The aim of the Society was to organise the translation and publication of Pali literature and to raise the necessary funding from individuals, universities and other interested institutions.

Rhys-Davids originally conceived of the Text Society's work going on for ten years, but it remains in existence to this day. In 1971 the then President of the Society, I.B. Horner, detailed the achievments of the Society [65]. She said that romanized editions of almost every book in the Pali Tripiṭika together with the commentary on each of these, besides a considerable number of smaller works had been produced. There had been publication of translations of these texts, of a few of the commentaries and some of the smaller works. Like the romanized editions in Pali, almost all the books of the Tripiṭika were completed in translation. In addition the Society has published dictionaries, grammars and concordances. Relatively few people beyond scholars and authors consulted these volumes as they emerged, but extracts were quoted in books about Buddhism and in anthologies.

Christmas Humphreys lists some of the books which would have been available to the reading public at Probsthain's oriental bookshop in Great Russell Street in 1908. As well as Arnold's The Light of Asia and Rhys-Davids' Buddhism, the list includes Rhys-Davids' later works Buddhism, Its History and Literature (1904); Buddhist India (1896); and Early Buddhism (1908). [66]

The work of the Pali Text Society was a force behind the major focus of attention on the Theravada tradition and this was further reinforced by contact with individuals and organisations in Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. Some of these contacts came about because of the reception given to The Light of Asia and its author, and to Rhys-Davids and his

work with Pali translations. After visiting Buddha Gaya and the Bodhi Temple in India, said to mark the spot of the Buddha's Enlightenment, Arnold began a campaign to restore it to the hands of the Buddhists. At the time of Arnold's visit it was the property of a Saivite priest. Moving on to Sri Lanka from India, Arnold, who was much celebrated by Sinhalese Buddhists for his famous poem, articulated his ideas for the restoration of Buddha Gaya.

Arnold's challenge was subsequently taken up by Anagarika Dharmapala who formed the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891, with the object of establishing a Buddhist monastery and funding a Buddhist college at Buddha Gaya. Representatives from seven Buddhist countries were listed in the inaugural constitution [67].

In 1893 Arnold published a long article in the Daily Telegraph inviting the "vast and intelligent British public" to support the campaign to return Buddha Gaya to the Buddhists via the Maha Bodhi Society [68]. The first President of the Maha Bodhi Society was Sumangala Maha Thera, a Sri Lankan bhikkhu and the Thai representative was Prince Chandradar Chudatdhar. The Director and Chief Adviser was the former New York lawyer and co-founder of the Theosophical Society [69].

Rhys-Davids' and Arnold's work for Buddhism clearly entailed close co-operation with, and encouragement from, well-disposed Asian Buddhists. Clausen and Almond for their own purposes properly restrict themselves to accounts of the British Victorians' rendering of Buddhism and connections

between scholarly activities and popular interest. It will become evident that the two were to remain closely linked for many years. However, as we have seen the full picture extends to include Asian Buddhists who both contributed to and were influenced by that rendering.

Theosophy

The role of the Theosophical Society in promoting Buddhism both in Europe and Asia was considerable. In Britain its influence was both direct and indirect: direct in the sense that Theosophists converted to Buddhism, indirect through its diffusion of concepts such as reincarnation and karma.

Theosophy, as expounded by Blavatsky in her several bulky publications beginning with Isis Unveiled in 1877, had its roots in spiritualism. Its doctrines scarcely approximate to the orthodox doctrines of Buddhism, but in its eclectic way Theosophy claims Buddhism as a source of inspiration, just as it claims the Hindu, Taoist, Confucian and Cabbalistic traditions [70]. Blavatsky regarded the Buddha as an Adept or Initiate, along with other great teachers such as Jesus [71]. Conveniently, she presents both Buddha and Jesus as each expounding two types of teaching, one exoteric, the other (most properly understood by Theosophists), was esoteric.

> "Their desire was, without revealing to all the sacred mysteries of initiation, to give the ignorant and the misled, whose burden in life was too heavy for them, hope enough and an inkling into the truth sufficient to support them in their heaviest hours. But the object of both Reformers was frustrated, owing

> to excess of zeal of their later followers. The words of the Masters having been misunderstood and misinterpreted, behold the consequences." [72]

With this device Madame Blavatsky was able to accommodate the doctrine of the Universal Spirit to Buddhist atheism. In a similar way she dealt with immortality and the problem of nirvana.

> "Enquirer: But surely the Buddha must have repudiated the soul's immortality if all the Orientalists and his priests say so?
>
> Theosophist: The Arhats began by following the policy of their master and the majority of the subsequent priests were not initiated just as in Christianity: and so little by little, the great esoteric truths became almost lost." [73]

Madame Blavatsky claimed that her mediumistic powers enabled her to receive instructions from spiritual masters dwelling in remote and mysterious parts of the world, notably Tibet. It was the Adepts who revealed the teachings of Theosophy and guided the lives of its leading members [74].

From a sociological point of view Theosophy can be seen as containing within itself resolutions of some of the central religious tensions of the late Victorian era. It was a new system much opposed to orthodox Christianity without rejecting either the figure of Jesus or the Gospels. Its institutional organisation had more in common with the learned societies than with ecclesiastical organisations, with its headquarters, lecture halls, president, secretary and branch societies or lodges as they were known. Furthermore, Theosophy was international with lodges in European and Asian countries. Theosophy also claimed the

sanction of great traditions of the past while, at the same time, it embraced the new discipline of comparative religion as providing access to them.

Blavatsky's books quote liberally from the translations of oriental texts that were becoming more readily available. Also, and perhaps most crucially, Theosophy claimed that the esoteric doctrines of the world's major religions concurred with the tenets of modern science.

Theosophy helped to forge connections between oriental Buddhists and Western seekers during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Reports of the activities of Blavatsky and Olcott in building up support for the Theosophical Society in India among both Europeans and Hindus appeared in The Ceylon Times, and as a result the pair were invited to visit the island for a two month tour in 1880 [75]. During the tour they took the Five Precepts in front of a huge crowd who echoed their responses [76]. In the eyes of the world Blavatsky and Olcott had declared themselves to be Buddhists. By taking the Five Precepts they were pioneers.

There was speculation about the true religious allegiance of Edwin Arnold [77] and of Rhys-Davids - were they crypto-Buddhists? Both men hedged the question and stopped short of proclaiming themselves to be actual Buddhists. The founders of Theosophy were certainly bolder, but one is tempted to judge them as less honest. The doctrines of Theosophy which they continued to propound were not altered to match those of the Theravada, nor did the messages from the "Adepts" cease.

The Theosophical Society became a fashionable home for certain disaffected Christians of the leisured class that frequented the salons of London high society, a milieu in which Blavatsky spent the last years of her life. She died in 1891. The Society rose to further prominence when Mrs Annie Besant, social reformer, Fabian Socialist, freethinker and one time declared agnostic, joined its leading ranks in 1889. In harnessing her unbounded energy to the propagation of Theosophy, notably through her extensive lecture tours, Annie Besant generated a new, wider audience for arguments against Christian exclusivism, and for the opening up to "oriental ideas", such as the notion of reincarnation.

The Pali Text Society provided institutional support for Buddhism in Britain as a source of unimpeachable scholarship, while the Theosophical Society with its more eccentric rendering of Buddhist thought embodied a populist approach.

The New Century and the Buddhist Society

After the turn of the century there began, albeit in a small way, a movement towards the shared practice of Buddhism as a religion in its own right, as opposed to a preoccupation with the meaning of Buddhist thought or the syncretic approach of Theosophy.

In 1890 a young British scientist, Allan Bennet, read the Light of Asia and resolved to study Buddhism [78]. Eight years later he journeyed to Sri Lanka where, after a period of study, he formulated a plan to lead a Buddhist mission to Britain. Believing that such a mission could only succeed if

carried out by a member of the Sangha, he took ordination as a monk in Burma in 1902 and became known as Ananda Metteyya. While in Rangoon he founded an international Buddhist society to be known as the Buddhasāsana Samagama. He envisaged that the new organisation would be established first in the Buddhist countries of Asia and later extend to Europe. Hon. Secretary of the Rangoon Society was Dr. E. R. Rost [79]. Rost was a member of the Indian Medical Service. While in England on leave in 1907 he met Col. J.R. Pain, an ex-soldier from Burma [80]. In Bury Street, London, close by the British Museum, they opened a Buddhist bookshop. Pain and Rost were joined in this venture by R.J. Jackson who had come to Buddhism after reading The Light of Asia and attending a lecture at Cambridge. Humphreys describes how lectures were held in small rooms at the back of the shops as well as in the London Parks. The Buddhists, for that is how they regarded themselves, spoke in the parks from a portable platform painted bright orange and bearing the logo - "The word of the Glorious Buddha is Sure and Everlasting." [81] The Bury Street enthusiasts decided to form a society to prepare for the coming of Ananda Metteya to England, although the printed invitation that was sent to likely interested parties announcing the inaugural meeting did not indicate that missionary activity would be the focus of the new society [82]. The wording implies that the evangelical style of the park lectures was modified to accommodate potential supporters who were not prepared to be counted as full-blooded converts; it advertises a "meeting of Buddhists and

those interested in the study of Buddhism, Pali and Sanskrit literature." [83] Rhys-Davids had already accepted the office of President.

Christmas Humphreys classifies the founding members of the Society into three categories, the scholars who, in addition to Rhys-Davids, included Prof. E.J. Mills, a professor of chemistry, Hermann Oldenberg, Sir Charles Eliott and Loftus Hare, a leading Theosophist. Among those who were interested in leading an active Buddhist life Humphreys numbers Francis Payne and Captain Ellam, first editor of the Society's journal, The Buddhist Review. A third group were

> "students of comparative religion and intelligent, educated men and women of the type who dissatisfied with their own religious life, study all new movements which offer to supply the deficiency." [84]

Ananda Metteyya's mission arrived from Burma in April 1908 and met with problems from the outset. The demands of supporting a monk were too great for the small band who were prepared to try. Humphreys provides a vivid account of what took place:

> "No sooner however, had the mission landed than difficulties attendant on a member of the sangha keeping his Bhikkhu vows in a Western city became embarrassingly apparent. He was not allowed to sleep in a house where a woman slept; hence the need for two houses at Barnes. His food could only be eaten at specified hours, with nothing later than noon. He slept on a bed on the floor, to avoid breaking the Precept against "high soft beds", and in every other way tried to preserve the ascetic dignity of his adopted life. The most awkward situations however, arose not in the house but out of it. He was not allowed to handle money, so could never travel alone. But he wore at all times the bright yellow robes of the Sangha, and such a garb brought

> wandering crowds and ribald comment. It was therefore arranged that he should be taken to and from meetings in a cab. But the Vinaya rules, framed in the days when to ride behind a horse spelt pomp and circumstance, forbade such a method of locomotion, and had not motor cars begun to invade the streets it is difficult to see what the harassed lay supporter would have devised." [85]

The mission which had arrived in April returned to Burma in October, but not before a number of English Buddhists beginning with Francis Payne and his wife and children took the Five Precepts in Metteyya's presence. The event was regarded as a kind of formal conversion ceremony. The work of the Society continued and the Fifth Annual Meeting in 1913 disclosed a membership, including associates,numbering nearly 200. Some twenty five lectures were reported to have been delivered during the year, many of which were subsequently published in the quarterly journal. Also at the this time 160 to 190 copies of the journal were sold by " the Trade" and forty five libraries received free copies. [86]

After the First World War the Society developed contacts with Buddhists in Sri Lanka, partly through the new editor of the Buddhist Review,a Sri Lankan temporarily resident in London, D.B. Jayatilaka. He appealed to the Buddhists of Asia for funds for the Society to carry out its work and help was quickly forthcoming from C.A. Hewavitarne and Anagarika Dharmapala both of the same family. However, the Society continued to struggle for survival, especially after the deaths of three active members. [87]

In 1924 Christmas Humphreys, who had contact with the Buddhist Society, collected together " Theosophists of a

Buddhist way of thought" to form the Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society [88]. The first meeting was held at the house of a Council member of the expired society, Mrs Forsyth, in London. Humphreys tells us that of the eight people present three came from Sri Lanka, one from Burma and the rest, including Humphreys's bride-to-be, were British. Two years later the Buddhist Lodge became an independent society, and in the same year Anagarika Dharmapala and two other Sri Lankan monks arrived in Britain to launch the British Maha Bodhi Society [89]. The two societies did not amalgamate because, the Sri Lankan Mission was exclusively Theravadin and the British Buddhist Society did not wish to be restricted to receiving the teachings of any one Buddhist school. Dharmapala's mission did not meet with any great success mainly because the two monks did not speak English well. The Lodge, which came to be known as the Buddhist Society after the dissolution of the former society in 1926, published a monthly journal, Buddhism in England. In 1943 this was replaced by The Middle Way, which has survived to the present.

The Buddhist Society adopted a strategy favoured by Ananada Metteyya, of making known Buddhist principles by means of cheap literature [90]. In 1928 they published a 256 page book What is Buddhism? - an Answer from the Western Point of View, which sold for only three shillings as most of the material had already appeared in the magazine, and the following year came Humphrey's pamphlet A Religion for Modern Youth. In 1935 a committee of authors published

Concentration and Meditation, a 340 page volume priced at three shillings and sixpence.

A meditation circle was formed in 1930 by members who "realised that any association formed to make known spiritual principles should have a heart as well as a head." [91] During the 1950s there were several visits from the Japanese scholar Prof. D.T. Suzuki, leading to a growth of interest in Zen Buddhism, a movement much encouraged by Humphreys who visited Japan in 1946 [92].
In the meantime the numbers of people able to make contact with Buddhist institutions in Britain continued to grow as the London Buddhist Society became more well known, and societies were established in the provinces.

Events in London moved on. In 1954 a group of five Sri Lankan philanthropists were persuaded to form a trust to re-establish the Maha Bodhi Society vihara which had been forced to close during the Second World War. A vihara was subsequently opened with two monks at Ovington Gardens, in south-west London. In 1963 management of the vihara was taken over by the Maha Bodhi Society [93] and in 1966 the British Maha Bodhi Society was resuscitated by the Sinhalese monk Ven. Saddhatissa, the then senior incumbent at the vihara. [94].

Writing in 1972 Candamitto describes the vihara as "a national church for Ceylonese Buddhists and native born Buddhists," whereas he describes the Buddhist Society as "an English Buddhist organisation run by English Buddhists for Buddhists of all nations." [95] He found that the emphasis

at the vihara was on providing Theravada rituals for Sri Lankan expatriates and visitors.

Summary

The interaction between traditional Theravada Buddhism and the influence of Western culture evolved into a process of mutual modification. The progress of Buddhism in the new setting was contingent upon what was happening in the old. While the emergence of a sympathetic response to Buddhism among Europeans actually influenced the course of events in Asia. Consequently the direction of Buddhism in its traditional cultural environment was irrevocably intertwined with innovations in an alternative milieu.
The excitement generated by some Western scholars on discovering the richness of the Buddhist texts, and the creation of an organisation such as the Pali Text Society, was a sufficient factor, among several, in stimulating the Buddhist resurgence in Theravada countries. In part scriptural, the resurgence led to the re-affirmation of the universal tendency in Buddhism, even though paradoxically it also served as a focus for nationalist aspirations. When set against Christianity, Buddhists perceived their own historical religion (sāsana) as having equal claims to be a world religion. The notion of a world wide mission was nurtured by the elite, of which the Hewavitarne family present a prime example.

The reforms outlined in the first half of this chapter constructed a revived Theravada that in many respects came

close to the "pure" Buddhism promoted and debated over by the nineteenth century European scholars, with its rationalism, its atheism and sparsity of ritual, and its new relevance to the worldling as well as the renouncer. On this last point Gombrich has explained that the Anagarika status created by Dharmapala failed to catch on because:

> "... within a short time many monks became socio-politically active, while many laymen became this worldly ascetics. This convergence superseded the need for a label - everyone, so to speak, is an Anagarika now." [96]

We shall discover in the following pages that the term Anagarika has subsequently been appropriated for yet another version of a role mid-way between monk and lay person, this time signifying a lengthy postulancy to the bhikkhu-saṅgha.

Developments that helped build the reforms in Sri Lanka were underway during Rhys-Davids' sojourn there, and it was through their lens that he interpreted the Pali texts and explicated his interpretation to a wider public in Asia and Europe via his lectures and writings.

The real missionary is however thought by the Sri Lankan Buddhists to be Dharmapala [97]. Nor is this an entirely false picture, for some of the Westerners that he influenced when on his travels went on to play an important role in the propagation of the religion. The Maha Bodhi Society, founded by Dharmapala, with its international journal was significant both for the spread of Buddhism to the West and for its contribution to the revival of Buddhism in India.

In Thailand when Buddhism was challenged by science the response was to adapt by resorting to a new pristine orthodoxy, which had, in any case, begun to emerge via the reforms initiated by Rama I prior to the period of economic colonialism. In Burma the teachings of the Buddha were called upon to help assimilate Western ideas about democratic socialism.

It is too simple and imprecise to explain "export Buddhism" away by saying that it is a westernised variant of Theravada, and the creation of Western intellectuals as suggested by King. We have seen how in Theravada countries Buddhists were able to draw on their own traditional resources as well as creating new ones through borrowing.

In Britain the growth of Buddhist organisations resulted not only from the pull of interest among Western people, but also from political and social circumstances in Asia, which gave a certain push to the West. When taken up by Buddhists in Asia the committee form of organisation, typical of British Buddhist organisations, established a point of cross-cultural convergence in acting as a structure for international information exchange. It was the Buddhist Theosophical Society in Sri Lanka, with its committees and sub-divisions, that sent Dharmapala to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 [98]. Olcott served on the founding committee of the Maha Bodhi Society alongside a Sri Lankan monk and a member of the Thai royal family.

Clearly intricate patterns of exchange and the cross-dissemination of ideas and institutional forms were

originally established between European and Asian cultures during the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. Future chapters will explore aspects of these continuing complex trans-cultural inter-actions and their contingent social and religious consequences in Britain.

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CHAPTER TWO

TESTING TIMES AND THE NEW ORDER

Christmas Humphreys' full account of Ananda Mettayya's 1908 mission, quoted in part in the last chapter, identifies cultural dissonance as the major source of difficulties. [1] To most of the lay people the rules that Mettayya observed as a monk, although in many ways apparently admirable, were a source of confusion, obscurity, and inconvenience. Looking back on the event Humphreys' tone is mildly exasperated. Later, in an article written in 1972 for the Middle Way, Humphreys, in his role as founder and life long President of the Buddhist Society, expounds his views on why, during the fifty years since Mettayya's death attempts to "establish a branch of the Theravada sangha in London have met without success." [2]

In part Humphreys blamed the foreign nature of the Vinaya rules. Putative bhikkhus must try to

> "...fit their English minds and morals and habits of life into an utterly alien tradition, to adopt a strange appearance, eat at unaccustomed times, live celibate lives unknown to their young contemporaries, to look on women in what to them is a totally unnatural way."

He thought that the answer might be to adapt some of the Vinaya rules, just as the "Chinese take a 'medicine meal' in the evening, as needful to health in northern latitudes," so might Englishmen eschew the rules restricting the final meal of the day to being taken before noon. Furthermore, said Humphreys, money might be used by a monk for travelling if

drawn from a "common fund." Women would have to be "regarded as something above a perambulating menace to chastity," and self discipline of thought and act "controlled by a system of confession modified to our changing Western ideas." Finally came the two points he stressed most firmly, "these young men must use their hands and bodies in useful and creative exercise, preferably close to nature, growing their own food...they must mix freely with their fellow citizens in order to appreciate the problems created by the modern stress of life." [3]

In the same issue of the journal another active member of the British Buddhist establishment, Philip Eden, wrote in an article entitled Buddhism's Future in the West:

> "I am quite convinced that if the right key could be found a floodgate of interest in Buddhism would be opened up in the West."

His article took the form of a passionate essay on the solutions that Buddhism could offer a greedy, materialistic and failing "technological civilisation." [4]

Eden and Humphreys were reflecting a debate that characterised the mood of British Buddhists at this period. Progress had been made, but was it enough? By 1972 the Society had 1,600 members and 700 extra subscribers to its journal. There were 305 regular attenders at the lectures and classes held in the London headquarters and thirty six Buddhist groups across Britain were in contact with the Society. [5]

By the early seventies there were two Theravada viharas (monasteries) in London. The Sri Lankan inspired Maha Bodhi

Society vihara seemed to Humphreys to be "in no sense an English branch of the Buddhist sangha," and "in spite of the eminence and dedication of some of its monks, played little part in the further development of Buddhism in England." [6] The second establishment, the Buddhapadipa Temple, opened in East Sheen and was later superseded by a new building in Wimbledon. Buddhapadipa was set up by the Thai government under royal patronage and its bhikkhus are religious representatives of the Royal Thai Embassy. It functions as part of the Thai "national church" serving Thai people living in Britain.

In 1972 Candamitto undertook a study of Wat Buddhapadipa and discovered 116 non-Thais supporting the Wat and paying an annual subscription to receive its journal [7]. The non-Thais attended a special weekly teaching programme while Thai adherents had their own programme that was closed to non-Thais. Candamitto comments:

> "British Buddhists try to learn about Buddhism, Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist meditation and so on. In contrast Thai Buddhists in the U.K. prefer to make merit than to study Buddhist teaching. They come to see the monks and they like following Buddhism mainly by way of ceremony and religious services." [8]

Humphreys remarked that at Buddhapadipa "the organisation remained solidly Thai." [9] He also felt that the presence of the Thai and Sri Lankan viharas made the possibility of a westernised Sangha more complicated, pointing out that if the Vinaya was relaxed to suit conditions in the West the South East Asian bhikkhus in

London might not accept the newly ordained bhikkhus "as of their own standing." [10]

Here Humphreys revealed the dilemma in which some British Buddhists of his day felt themselves to be caught. For while the Vinaya rules had proved burdensome to accommodate to British life, any extensive adaptation could take a British Sangha beyond the pale of Theravada inclusiveness and authenticity. As Richard Gombrich explains, religions of Indian origin tend to be more concerned with consistency in matters of practice than purely doctrinal issues; orthopraxy is set above orthodoxy [11]. In order then to understand why early attempts to establish a British Sangha failed, and how success was finally achieved in the late 1970s, it is necessary to consider the corporate nature of Theravada monasticism and the collective practices by which it came to be defined.

Belonging to the Sangha

Metaphors of solitude abound in the Pali canon and in the popular non-canonical texts such as the Dhammapada. Detachment is presented as the ideal inner condition to be striven for, an essential precondition for happiness, tranquillity, and ultimately of enlightenment. The prescribed setting for the pursuit of this ostensibly individual goal, attained through self cultivation, is however that of a voluntary association of fellow seekers, a spiritual fraternity. The images of solitariness are in no way intended to diminish the significance of the collective,

the Sangha, whose specific form of social relations is set out in detail in the Vinaya texts and regarded as the word of the Buddha (Pali - buddhavacana) [12].

Interactions between monks are, in themselves, perceived as the locus of individual inspiration and spiritual progress in as much as they engender harmony and a wholesome spiritual environment free of behaviour polluted by selfishness, greed, and hatred. The Buddha tells his close disciple Ananda that "good friendship is the whole of the holy life." [13] The Sangha supports the individual bhikkhu in his personal practice and in turn requires from him observance of the pāṭimokkha discipline. The Sangha has collective authority over the individual via disciplinary procedures surrounding the regulation that monks meet regularly and in concord, where assent to disciplinary action against individual monks is signalled by silent consensus. Disciplinary actions range from expulsion in the case of a major offence against the strictures of the Vinaya, such as killing or certain types of sexual misconduct, to forfeits and periods of extra supervision for minor offences. The precise nature of offences and the appropriate responses, as well as the procedures for corporate action are outlined in detail in the Vinaya texts and interpreted by the commentaries.

Ordination is controlled and carried out by the Sangha. The Pali word that is translated as ordination is pabbajjā and has the literal meaning of "going forth." The ordination ceremony, upasampadā, is thus a symbolic rite of passage from one order of social life to another. The order of life that

is left behind is that of "leaving home for homelessness." The bhikkhu is homeless in the sense that he has ceremonially severed the obligations of kinship, suspended his reproductive life and removed himself from the processes of economic production. Of course, his mendicant status places him in a relationship of stark dependency on the ordinary social world of family life and productivity, and that must be taken into account, although for the present it will be set aside to concentrate on the internal workings of the Sangha.

The new order of social life represented by the ideal of "homelessness" consists of a monk taking up his place in the monastic community where close face to face relations resembling kinship structures prevail. The Theravada Sangha, although characteristically egalitarian, possesses a hierarchy based on seniority, calculated by the number of Rains Retreats (vassa) spent as a monk over consecutive years.

One important standard by which the monastic community as a whole can check its own authenticity and establish orthodoxy is through the notion of an ordination lineage. Authentic ordination, and true membership of the Sangha, rests on the individual bhikkhu having had as a preceptor at his ordination ceremony another bhikkhu whose own preceptor belonged to an ordination lineage. Lineages may be traceable historically to certain famous monks, and/or his disciples. At the mythic level all lineages are ultimately traceable to the Buddha, as founder of the Order and initial preceptor.

For all these reasons the Theravada Sangha can be viewed not only as an organised institution with ancient origins, but also as a powerful religious symbol of mutual spiritual succour. It is one of the Three Refuges, on a par with the Buddha and his teaching, the Dhamma, with which it forms the Triple Gem of Buddhism. Within its operation exists a host of social and cultural activities - scholarship, interpretation of Buddhist practice, instructing the laity, the practice of medicine, interaction with the body politic and so on. Networks of communication stretch across state boundaries, where there has been a long history of inter-relationships between the Sangha of Buddhist countries.

Carrithers has explained the evolution of the Theravada Sangha from its origins in India in the sixth century B.C. through to later events in Sri Lanka as being marked by two distinct constitutions. Both remain operable in contemporary Theravada Buddhism and are detectable within the pages of canonical and post-canonical classics. The first constitution produces what Carrithers characterises as a sangha in the lower case, as opposed to the later capitalised Sangha [14]. Here the sangha is depicted as a cell or small group of co-resident bhikkhus. From earliest times there were numbers of these cells spread throughout the countryside and just as the Vinaya rules pertaining to the individual comportment of a bhikkhu applied to all, so the rules of corporate life - the acceptance of new members through ordination, the maintenance of discipline, rights of residence, the management of communal property and the order

of communal rituals - were universally applied within each cell.

The procedures for the enactment of the legal system of the Vinaya texts required purity of the indvidual monk through his adherence to the pāṭimokkha. A guarantee of individual purity being prerequisite for corporate acts that warranted common purity "before they could be legal."

The corporate community of "homeless ones" was circumscribed by a legally constituted and spatially drawn boundary (Pali - simā). Within each boundary the community formed a sammukhībhūta-saṅgha, "because this sangha was to be organised by the Bhikkhus 'existing face to face' within the boundary at one time." [15]. To the present day, for the community inside the simā, Vinaya rules obtain for the equal share of whatever robes are donated by the laity and for the equal share of food [16]. However, "there were no offices of authority." [17] This amorphous structure of non-hierarchically organised inter-connected cells institutionalised the ideology of "personal autonomy and communal harmony so important in the Buddha's teachings." [18]

There was however also operable an extended notion of "sangha" that "transcended the concept of boundaried communities." [19] That is the concept of cātuddisa-saṅgha (The Sangha of the Four Directions) mentioned in the Mahavagga and the Cullavagga of the Pali canon. It consists of "those who have come in and those who have come in and those who have not." [20] According to Holt, such a notion

"provided each <u>sammukhibhūta-saṅgha</u> with an opportunity to participate in something greater than itself." [21]

Certain elements of concrete authority were attached to the <u>cātuddisa-saṅgha</u>, for example in asserting "ownership of anything that was of permanent quality" such as buildings and furnishings held to belong to all bhikkhus of the present and all bhikkhus of the future. The consequence is an ideal whereby the cells and the individuals that compose them are to be regarded as one homogeneous corporation. [22] However, it is important to note Carrithers' insistence that there was no provision in the Vinaya "for the Sangha to act as a corporation in the wider society." [23]

Although the principle of self governing autonomy within the <u>sīmā</u> boundary was to remain a central and jealously guarded one in Theravada monastic organisation, changes did occur which provided for a second, additional constitution. In the middle of the third century B.C. the Indian Emperor Asoka, as a patron of Buddhism, instigated a reform of the bhikkhus in his kingdom by expelling a dissident faction. Asoka's role as the legitimiser and purifier of the Sangha was imitated and expanded upon by the converted Sri Lankan Buddhist king, Devanampiyatissa, whose actions led the way for the island's "single sangha, the Mahavihara, to become the Sangha, upper case, the clergy of a Buddhist nationalist state." [24]

From a position whereby the Sangha had no recourse to any authority beyond itself it moved to a situation where the king's power reaches within the Sangha, and "with the elders'

co-operation and by specifically monastic legal forms, regulates the Sangha's affairs." [25]

In his two major works Tambiah has analysed, with special reference to Thailand, the Buddhist politics that emerged in South and South East Asia based on

> "the symbiosis and mutuality between the Sangha as an order of monks dedicated to the vocation of liberation and the king as righteous ruler whose obligation was to protect and secure the religion of the Buddha as the special treasure of his people." [26]

The Sangha, of course, being the repository of that treasure.

In Thailand the contemporary version of Buddhist polity evolved through a series of governmental Acts on the Administration of the Buddhist Order of Sangha (1902,1941,1964) with the purpose of organising the monkhood as "a national institution and indeed to bring the Order under state control." [27] A series of ecclesiastical offices were created "along the lines of the Thai civil administration." [28] The king, who has the final authority in all Church affairs, appoints the Supreme Patriarch (Somdet Phrasangkharat) who stands at the apex of the ecclesiastical pyramid. He appoints, with the king's approval, a number of senior bhikkhus to serve on the Council of Elders (Mahatherasamakhom). There are also a number of local ecclesiastical administrative units and officials, the smallest being the individual monastery or Wat and its presiding Abbot (Chao Awat). There is a Department of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Education, "occupied

almost exclusively with matters pertaining to the Sangha as Church of Thailand." [29]

Alongside the formal ecclesiastical organisation one must set the "tendency of the Sangha to organise itself along the lines of pupillary succession, resembling kinship, rather than along bureaucratic lines." [30]

Carrithers traces elements of this tendency to Buddhism's origins and continuity in sedentary, agrarian societies and the Sangha's dispersal among the peasantry from whom it draws recruits. Although as stated by Carrithers "effective control within such a group does not usually survive the death of the eldest," [31] we shall see that disciples of one master may set up their own pupillary lineages which bear his legitimizing stamp. Such lineages may exist only within a single monastery, or may proliferate a number of branch monasteries. The tie between a "mother monastery", that of the master, and branch monasteries has important implications for missionary endeavours beyond the indigenous setting.

The English Sangha Trust

Equipped with the perspective provided in the previous discussion on the institutionalisation of the Sangha we are now in a better position to understand and assess the difficulties awaiting those who sought to establish a British Sangha, co-ordinate with, but independent of the Thai and Sri Lankan viharas in London. For still there were some willing to persist against very real socio-cultural obstacles.

In 1956 a group of associates dissatisfied with the largely intellectual pursuits of the Buddhist Society formed the English Sangha Trust with the aim of establishing and supporting a bhikkhu-sangha able to provide meditation instruction for lay people. The main force behind the Trust was the Englishman, William Purfhurst, who ordained as a bhikkhu in 1954 at Wat Paknam, Bangkok, becoming Ven. Kapilavaddho. On the formation of the Trust he took up residence in a condemned house in Swiss Cottage, where he was joined by a Welshman, Peter Morgan, also ordained as a bhikkhu in Thailand under the name of Pannavaddho. A highly energetic man, Kapilavaddho never turned down an invitation to speak.

> "The exhausting pace that he set meant that he slept little, sometimes on park benches in his cotton robes, and snatched snacks in between talks and train rides." [32]

After a year of this his health was seriously undermined and he was forced to disrobe. Pannavaddho struggled on alone for five years and for most of that time was engaged in public speaking, sometimess being kept talking into the early hours, even though as a bhikkhu he was expected to be up and "with the robes" at dawn [33]. Eventually, aware that he was receiving no further training in the Vinaya or meditation, Pannavaddho returned to Thailand and was replaced by a Canadian, Ananda Bodhi, who had also been ordained in Thailand.

At this point, although regular financial contributions had declined, the Trust's finances were bolstered by a

bequest [34] followed by what was then a very large sum of £24,000 donated by a Birmingham businessman. The Trustees decided to use the money to purchase two adjacent properties at 129 and 131 Haverstock Hill, Hampstead, London in September 1962. Number 129 was let to provide an income for the Trust and Ananda Bodhi was installed next door. But he too was caught up in the punishing treadmill of public talks [35] and by November 1963 was on his way back to the relative peace of a South East Asian monastery, leaving the vihara without an incumbent.

There were several reasons for this state of affairs which cannot be understood purely in terms of the qualities of particular persons and their limitations. As has been demonstrated, the life of a bhikkhu is fulfilled within the monastic community of which he is a part. It is within the community that the junior bhikkhu receives training from his seniors in the refinements of the Vinaya, and it is here that his practice is regulated and purified according to monastic convention. The Hampstead bhikkhus were largely inexperienced and quite junior by the measurements of the Theravada system. Novices (Pali - sāmaṇera) were ordained via the link with the Buddhapadipa Temple and took up residence at Hampstead, but the senior incumbents were insufficiently endowed with the necessary experience to provide Vinaya training. Consequently, the sāmaṇeras either disrobed or left for South East Asia to find a teacher. This meant that the British Sangha had no opportunity to increase its numbers, for without the required quorum of four fully

ordained bhikkhus the twice monthly uposatha ritual could not be performed.

There was another problem as well. The Vinaya regulations surrounding the uposatha require that all fully ordained residents of a monastery must present themselves for a communal recitation of the pāṭimokkha code. Furthermore, periodically during the recitation "the learned and competent" elder leading the recital asks all those present if they are blameless with regard to the rules just pronounced. "By their silence bhikkhus acknowledge their purity." [36] Offences are to be confessed and dealt with prior to the recitation. Holt explains the uposatha rite thus:

> "It is this unified collective expression of purity that acknowledges, legitimates and perpetuates the bhikkhusaṇgha as the authentic bearer of the spiritual path that was articulated by the Buddha. Moreover it recalls and maintains the relationship between the contemporary boundaried Sangha and 'the Sangha of the Four Quarters.' It is in fact the essential expression of bhikkhu communal life and spirituality that defines the identity of the order; it ties the boundaried community to its 'pristine past,' celebrates its contemporary successes and charisma, and makes possible the continuation of its mission in the future." [37]

Dependent, as it was most often, on a single incumbent and operating on an ad hoc basis residents of the Hampstead vihara were denied the fortnightly ceremony "which Durkheim might have called the Sangha's solidarity ritual." [38]

The isolation of the vihara as an outpost without a quorum was compounded by its position without the institutionalised inclusiveness of a national Sangha, and as

the preceptors of the Hampstead bhikkhus were all in Thailand, the links of pupilliary lineage were weak. Although relations with the Thai and Sri Lankan bhikkhus in London were amicable there was no firm and functional connection that anchored the vihara to Theravada ecclesiastical structures or connected with the Sangha network. The major link was the British bhikkhus' participation in cātuddisa-saṅgha by virtue of their ordination, but as has been noted the idea of cātuddisa-saṅgha is dependent on each bounded unit within it, each sammukhībhūta-saṅgha, individually observing the uposatha recitation and the procedures surrounding it.

Even so, it might have been possible for slow progress to have taken place with peripheral support from the Thai and Sri Lankan bhikkhus in London if greater emphasis had been placed on building relations with the small group of lay supporters. Two things precluded this from happening. Firstly,the incumbent generally spent too much time and energy on public engagements, and secondly, little attention was drawn to the significance of mendicancy in maintaining the equilibrium between monks and lay people.

In reality laymen are thought to be prevented from attaining the highest religious goal, nibbāna, by their secular preoccupations, even though theoretically the lay person is not debarred from Enlightenment [39]. Traditionally lay people accept "the secondary compensation of a prosperous rebirth" attained through the activity of merit-making, which consists of material support of the monks

and the Buddhist temple [40]. Merit (Pali - puñña), is a kind of "spiritual cash a medium of exchange." [41] The workings of the theory become even more complicated through a further series of processes explained by Gombrich as follows:

> "If merit lies in good intention, a person who does a meritorious deed - be it feeding monks or going on a pilgrimage - can get a second lot of merit by thinking generously, that he wishes other people could reap the benefits of his actions. Of course they cannot - that is the law of *kamma* - so he loses nothing, but he gets good marks, as it were, for wishing that they could. They too may wish that they could: they can empathize in his merit and *feel* as generous as if they had made the donation themselves; so they too collect good marks. The result is *as if* merit, spiritual currency, were transferred, with the difference that the original merit-maker does not lose his. Buddhists aptly compare the process to lighting one candle from another." [42]

The reciprocal relationship between Sangha and laity, whereby in exchange for material support monks uphold and disseminate Dhamma, is articulated in a ritual known as piṇḍapāta. In the piṇḍapāta ceremony lay people place cooked food into the bowls of monks who receive the offering in silence and with eyes cast down. In Thailand monks tread familiar routes along which they provide lay people with the opportunity to perform the act of ritualised giving, and to demonstrate the primary Buddhist virtue of generosity (Pali - dāna). In England the monks did not go on alms round, nor did they find an equal substitute for regularly dramatising and affectively consolidating the involvement of lay people with bhikkhus. Also, because the demand of the lay people in Britain was for meditation instruction and doctrinal

guidance, rather than for ceremonial or sacramental services, the relationship with the teacher in robes was less formal and less tinged with veneration than is the case in the traditional setting. Most of the pupils were educated, middle class professionals whose induction into Buddhism had been in the drawing room atmosphere of the Buddhist Society, with none of the socio-cultural inheritance that inculcates attitudes of deep respect and veneration for the saffron robe.

Some members of the English Sangha Trust had taken the trouble to familiarise themselves with the essentials of the Vinaya texts, which were available in a three volume edition translated by I.B. Horner for the Pali Text Society. Others knew very little, yet as providers of the facilities at the vihara, and as a Charitable Trust, constituted under English law, the members as a body were responsible for what went on at the Hampstead premises, and ultimate arbiter of standards. Inevitably there were uncertainties and differences about the precise nature of monastic conventions and these problems were to plague the Trust for the following three years, beginning with the incumbency of an English monk, Ven. Sangharakshita.

The E.S.T. and the Cult of the East

Sangharakshita was born Dennis Lingwood in 1925 and brought up in what has been described as a "working class family" in South London. His father was, it is claimed, of East Anglian stock and his mother part Hungarian [43]. Early

in life he developed a taste for the curious and the exotic, instigated by the collection of curios which his father's stepfather had brought back from oriental travels - "the most familiar and fascinating objects of my early childhood." [44] As a child Sangharakshita spent more time at home than his peers, because at the age of eight he was diagnosed, falsely as it turned out, as suffering from a heart condition entailing long absences from school [45].

With so much time on his hands the boy became a voracious reader. At the age of "twelve or thirteen" he wrote a Life of the Buddha, compiled mainly from The Children's Encyclopedia and H.G. Wells' A Short History of the World [46].

When evacuated to the West Country in the summer of 1940, Lingwood began to study Eastern literature, although it is not clear how the young evacuee came by "the classics of the East, particularly those of China, Persia and India," [47] and a copy of Blavatsky's Isis Unveiled. This last text led him to realise that despite "years of happy church going" he was "not a Christian and never had been." [48] A year later Sangharakshita was in London working at County Hall in a clerical post, and in the winter of 1943-44 he began to attend meetings at the Buddhist Society headquarters. By this time he had already been conscripted, and after nine months the signals unit to which he had been assigned as a wireless operator was posted to India [49].

In India Lingwood made contact with the Ramakrishna Mission, firstly in Delhi, and began experimenting with

meditation techniques. He spent a short time in Sri Lanka where his unfavourable impression of the Buddhist Sangha did not disturb his basic loyalty to Buddhism. Compared with the Ramakrishna Mission Centre he found the Buddhist temples and monasteries to be "in the grip of a strange inertia." [50} In 1945 his unit was ordered to Singapore and here he met Chinese Buddhist monks who, unlike the Sinhalese Buddhists, abstained from meat and fish. Under their influence he became a vegetarian - "One who claims to be a practising Buddhist ought logically to be a vegetarian." [51] He realised that he was opposed to violence of any kind and ought never to have allowed himself to have been conscripted. He longed to escape the "pettiness and futility" of army life, and after being granted six weeks leave in India he decided not to return to his unit for official demobilisation [52].

In India he worked at the Maha Bodhi Society headquarters doing secretarial tasks and became editor of the society's journal. He was also sent as a representative of the society to speak on Buddhism at the All India Religious Conference in Ahmedabad [53]. But it turned out that Lingwood and his Bengali friend, Bannerjee, found the atmosphere at the society's headquarters to be worldly and unspiritual, so the two decided to "follow the example of the Buddha and sever at one stroke our connection with an incorrigible world." They would wander as sadhus, holy men. In a symbolic gesture the pair destroyed their identity

papers, while holding on to their money in order to travel to Sri Lanka with the intention of ordaining as bhikkhus [54]

In the event lack of papers prevented the aspirant bhikkhus from being allowed to enter Sri Lanka. Then followed two years of wandering, during which time, in May 1949, they were given the <u>sāmaṇera</u> ordination by a Burmese bhikkhu at the Buddhist shrine of Kusinara, scene of the Buddha's Great Decease [55]. It was then that Dennis Lingwood received the name Sangharakshita. A year and a half later he received full ordination as a bhikkhu from another Burmese monk at Sarnath [56].

Even though a major theme of Sangharakshita's autobiographical account of his travels, <u>The Thousand Petalled Lotus</u>, is his search for ordination as a bhikkhu, the work is shot through with a deeply ambiguous attitude towards the Theravada Sangha. At one point he declares:

> "I eventually concluded that bhikkhus from South East Asia often did more harm than good to the cause of Buddhism in India." [57]

Such ambiguity was to lead to disappointment on all sides when he finally left India, and the Buddhist Centre he had established in the Himalayan border town of Kalimpong, to take over at the Hampstead vihara.

After a brief honeymoon differences between Sangharakshita and the lay Trustees began to flare up. In the opinion of some of the Trustees Sangharakshita's interpretation of the Vinaya was too loose. They complained that he did not shave his head and allowed his hair to reach normal growth and also that he wore ordinary clothes instead

of the bhikkhu's robes. More seriously, they accused him of allowing his personal relationships to transgress the bounds of propriety as explicated by the pāṭimokkha. When Sangharakshita returned to India on a visit the Trustees wrote a letter suggesting that he did not return as they were unwilling to continue supporting him.

In 1967, back in London and once more sporting the bhikkhu's robes with unorthodox style [58], Sangharakshita and a few loyal followers founded the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. A year later twelve of the Friends were "ordained" as founder members of the Western Buddhist Order. These two structures, the Friends and the Order became the basis for a lay Buddhist movement that ostensibly radically rejected monasticism, even though Sangharakshita continued to wear robes for ceremonial occasions and to style himself by his monastic name to which he sometimes attaches the honorific, Mahasthavira, "Great Elder." Sangharakshita's followers invariably refer to him as "bhante," a less formal term of address that Theravada lay people may use towards a bhikkhu and which roughly translates as Sir.

Sangharakshita's Buddhism was eclectic, drawing on the many different forms of Buddhism he had encountered and studied, including the neo-Buddhism of India, Chinese and Tibetan schols, as well as the Theravada tradition into which he had originally ordained. The syncretic ideology that emerged will subsequently be dealt with in detail. Here I will draw attention only to its essentially individualistic orientation which provides some indication of its potential

attraction among certain young people at this period. These were the sections of youth who were already drawn towards the values and symbols of that somewhat ill-defined cultural movement that was labelled "alternative," with its emphasis on self-fulfillment and "doing your own thing."

Sangharakshita imported his own brand of evolutionism into Buddhism by developing his notion of the True Individual who having broken away from the stifling conformity of the social order was free to develop a new form of consciousness to be equated with Buddhist teaching on Enlightenment. A Buddha should be seen as one who has pursued individuality to its ultimate conclusion and so attained a new and higher form of consciousness, tantamount to a new species of being.

After Sangharakshita's departure from Hampstead his place was taken by the return of Kapilavaddho who re-ordained at the Buddhapadipa Temple in 1967. However, he was to face a new set of problems created by the burgeoning of interest in Eastern religions that was part and parcel of late 1960's youth culture and the so-called alternative society. It was a trend that helped to swell the numbers of the newly created FWBO, but disturbed the tranquillity of the Hampstead vihara. I was told the story of how on one occasion a group of strangely clad youngsters arrived at the door and asked politely if they could use the Shrine Room for meditation. Kapilavaddho agreed uneasily and on checking the situation half an hour later found the group sprawled across the floor smoking cannabis. The story goes that when he asked them to leave he was threatened with violence.

It all became too much for Kapilavaddho, whose health was still not robust, and in the October issue of the Trust's reconstituted journal his decision to once again disrobe is explained:

> "Anyone who has eyes to see and ears to hear will be aware that in recent times not merely the phrases and attitudes of what is called Buddhism have been dreadfully misused by the sensually precocious denizens of the drug, pop and sex scene, but also the Bhikkhu's robe itself has been aped and adapted and draped incongrously over jeans, sweaters, anoraks and kaftans: and topped with hairstyles varying from the 'Mohican" to the aboriginal. In this rapidly changing world to maintain the nobility of bhikkhu-hood in the ancient manner is virtually impossible for one who has worn the robe with such distinction and devotion - so that the teaching of the ever present and ever valid Dhamma could continue in the ever needy 'Here and Now' of the 1970s." [59]

Two following issues of the journal contain letters from North American subscribers supporting the "non wearing of the robe" because "of its present association with hippies." [60] Le Roy Born applauds Kapilavaddho's decision and adds:

> "For now two years I have seen standing on the main street corner of Vancouver, B.C., two hippies in saffron robes, faces painted like heaven knows what savage tribe, selling a publication that amid articles on Eastern meditation, advertised wife swapping prospects." [61]

Kapilavaddho stayed on as a lay teacher at Hampstead until 1971, after which other lay members of the Trust tried to maintain a programme of classes and talks. In January 1971 as no monks were available to reside at the premises the name was changed from the Dhammapadipa Vipassana Vihara to

the Dhammapadipa Vipassana and Research Centre. For several years the Trust languished and the premises were under-utilised.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE FRUITS OF THE FOREST

In a thick forest grove in the jungle of Ubon Province in the north east of Thailand is an arresting notice - "You there, be quiet, we are trying to meditate." It marks the entrance to the internationally known Wat Pah Pong, a hermitage monastery founded by the ascetic bhikkhu and meditation master, Ajahn Chah [1]. Wat Pah Pong is one of a proliferation of hermitage monasteries established by individual disciples of Thailand's modern Buddhist saint, Ajahn Mun, who died in his eightieth year in 1949. Like their equivalents in Sri Lanka and Burma, the Thai hermitage monasteries are modern manifestations of an ancient two-fold division within the Theravada Sangha.

The most numerous Theravada bhikkhus are those whose primary role is both scholastic and ritual, in the sense that they teach Dhamma to their supporters and minister to their ceremonial requirements by chanting blessings and attending on life crisis rituals, such as the naming of infants and the cremation of the dead. A smaller proportion consists of monks who dedicate themselves in a more single-minded way to the spiritual goal of Enlightenment, through rigorous interpretation and precise practice of the Vinaya discipline and the pursuit of meditation practice. [2]

The distinction between these groups, based on the predominance of particular activities and consequent

modifications in life style, is also usually associated with differences of setting. The scholar monks are typically located in centres of population and known as gāmavāsi, while the meditating ascetics are to be found living apart from towns and at a distance from villages. They are known as vānavāsi, literally forest dwellers. Such is the division in its ideal form, but it is not laid down as a rule enforced by sanctions or rigid adherence to precedence. Urban monasteries have in the past, and do currently, sometimes promote meditation, and scholars have emerged from the ranks of the forest monks [3]. Nevertheless the division is sufficiently actual for Theravada Buddhists to acknowledge a separate "forest monk" tradition. In Thailand there is a general consensus that, unless otherwise stated, to speak of forest dwelling bhikkhus is to talk about meditating monks.

Although, as has already been explained, there is a single system of ecclesiastical administration, in Thailand the Sangha is divided into two sects (Pali - nikāya). During King Mongkut's reign a small reform movement emerged and later coalesced into the Thammayutika nikāya. The main body of the Sangha then became known as the Mahānikāya. The difference revolved around the practice and interpretation of Vinaya discipline, which is said to be more strict among the Thammayutika bhikkhus, who in general place a greater emphasis on learning than on pastoral duties [4]. Ascetic forest monks are found within both

sects. Ajahn Chah, for example, belongs to the supposedly less strict Mahānikāya.

The part that the forest monks have played in the history of Thai Buddhism is a long and intricate one. King Rama Khamheng (1275 - 1317 A.D.) ruler of the Thai kingdom of Sukhotai received "reformist and evangelical" Sri Lankan forest monks when he made Theravada the official religion of his kingdom [5]. Since when it has been the historical destiny of the forest monks to act as a "vitalizing force and countervailing agent to the religious establishment during periods of religious purification and cultural renaissance." [6]

Royal authority permitted the fundamentalist challenge of the forest monks because of their missionary activities and their willingness to locate themselves at the periphery of the king's territory. In this way the forest monks advanced settlements on the forest edge, bringing the local populace within the Buddhist fold and consolidating loyalty towards the Buddhist monarch (Pali - cakkavattin) [7].

Successful as they were in incorporating local cults into Buddhism, the forest monks did not abandon their vocation. Then, as now, village and forest monks would be found in the same area. As Klausner discovered, the vast majority of the rural bhikkhus of north east Thailand, the main geographical area for the modern forest hermitage revival, "are both concerned with and involved with the everyday life and problems of their followers." [8]. The forest monks' involvement does not extend to the kinds of

activities that are carried out by village monks who help to build wells, bridges, dams and roads, care for orphans and play a central part in village festivals. But the minority forest monks do not entirely remove themselves and villagers are major providers of food. For their part villagers tend to moderate their calls upon the services of the ascetic monks in recognition of the special charismatic position that the forest dwellers hold within the wider Sangha.

The charisma of the forest monks is attested to by their appeal to a wide spectrum of Thai society, including city dwellers, who are prepared to donate generously to the forest hermitages and to undertake arduous journeys in order to make their offerings (dāna) [9]. While meditating monks are sometimes credited with supernatural powers, spoken of in the canonical literature as being among the incidental effects of continuous meditation, this is not the sole source of their popularity. Throughout the canonical and non-canonical literature there are warnings to guard the practitioner against distraction by the apparently supernatural experiences resulting from meditation, and to affirm the true purpose of his efforts, which is the achievement of emancipation (Pali - vimutti) through the destruction of all internal hindrances. Thus the forest monk represents a central Buddhist virtue, purity.

The textual model for the pursuit of purity (Pali - visuddhi), beside the Vinaya Pitaka, is the Visuddhimagga

(Path of Purification), an exhaustive treatise on the practice and theory of meditation written by the Sri Lankan monk Buddhaghosa in the fifth century. In his writings Buddhaghosa systematised much of what was already present in the Canon, including the consistent view that "morality is a taken-for-granted prerequisite, component and fruit of meditation." [10] As a fundamental value, the matter of purity is particularly relevant to an understanding of why the Thai Buddhist lay people are enthusiastically generous in their support of the forest monks. Clifford Geertz's perspective on religious systems is useful here. He asserts that what religion, considered as a system of symbols, does is to stimulate powerful affective responses that motivate behaviour [11]. The motivation is achieved through formulating "conceptions of a general order of existence." [12] Certain motivations for behaviour may, in religious cultures, be prompted by "extrinsic sources of information" [13] communicated via doctrine and ritual, and taken for granted by the participants as basic and unassailable aspects of belief. An example from the case of Theravada Buddhism is the assumption, sometimes explicitly stated, that "only a morally sincere and good person can undertake meditation with success." [14]

At the very least a meditator must observe the basic Five Precepts, and more usually the full pātimokkha rules. True effectiveness further depends on the meditator possessing the positive moral qualities of "generosity, loving kindness, compassion and joy of others." [15] The

very practice of meditation over time refines and enhances the positive virtues as the meditator overcomes the Five Hindrances (Pali - _nīvaraṇa_) of sense desire, anger, sloth and torpor, agitation and worry, and doubt. By vanquishing the Hindrances the meditation master achieves _ñāṇadassanavisuddhi_, purity of knowledge and vision. It is this spiritual quality which draws the sophisticates of Bangkok to pay homage to the master and his disciples in the steamy jungles of north east Thailand.

Mention has already been made of how the Sangha in its entirety is perceived by the laity as a propitious field for the planting of merit through acts of _dāna_. It is therefore a logical step that the more pure the bhikkhus who receive the _dāna_ the more fertile the field of merit. Testimony to this is found in the Canon and in the folk tradition. Most Thai Buddhists know that the peasant girl who fed the Buddha milk-rice in the forest at Uruvela, prior to his enlightenment experienced a heavenly rebirth. Describing the situation in contemporary Thailand, Tambiah has written:

> "These saints, who had lived and worked in humble circumstances on the periphery of Thai society and territory, received the adulation and prostration of the urbanites of the country's capital, which was the hub of the Thai polity and society and the central arena where power and wealth were won and lost." [16]

It was through the celebration of the reputation of Ajahn Chah and his bhikkhus that a recently ordained American monk , Ven. Sumedho, found his way to Wat Pah Pong

and became the first Western bhikkhu to practice and live there. Sumedho had long been unhappy with the Episcopalian Christianity of his childhood, although for a period he had been "quite devout". [17] As he grew up he sensed that he did not understand the teachings of Christianity and could find no one to assist him:

> "There did not seem to be any way to practise Christianity other than just believing or blindly accepting what was said." [18]

During the Korean War Sumedho served in the U.S. Navy. He read books on Buddhism by the Japanese scholar Dr. Suzuki and encountered Buddhism live in Japan. He has described his discovery of Buddhism as "like a revelation." [19] After demobilisation there was a long period of study finalised by an M.A. in Asian Studies. Following that Sumedho spent a year as a volunteer with the Peace Corps in Borneo, from whence he made his way to Thailand. He spent his mornings in Bangkok teaching English and his afternoons meditating.

In 1966, at the age of thirty two, he decided to ordain as a monk and while on holiday in Laos met a Canadian bhikkhu who recommended that the ordination take place at a small Thai town across the Mekong. The Canadian's counsel was accepted and Sumedho ordained in a wat at Nong Kai [20]. Here he remained for a year practising meditation without a teacher until his Preceptor, seeing the seriousness of the American's intent,

sent him to Ajahn Chah, a meditation teacher of high repute [21].

At Wat Pah Pong Sumedho not only found meditation instruction, but also an opportunity to increase his knowledge of the application of Vinaya: "Conforming my behaviour to the major rules and learning the subtleties of minor ones." [22]

Daily life at the monastery was as much the focus of meditation practice as the formal sitting and walking meditation. Jack Kornfield, another American, who stayed for a while at Wat Pah Pong has written:

> "Washing robes, cleaning spittoons, sweeping the hall, collecting morning alms are all meditation and as Achaan Chah reminds us in 'cleaning a toilet don't feel you are doing it as a favour for anyone else.' There too meditation means mindfulness in whatever we do. At times the life style seems strict and harsh and the struggle to find comfort and security becomes a great lesson in meditation...In surrendering to the rules that create a harmonious community, we see clearly how desires and images we hold conflict with this flow. The strict discipline helps us cut away at the ego-needs for outward display or individuality." [23]

In this brief description of the forest life and its principles we can trace the correlation between the spiritual goal of the individual monk, and the community to which his behaviour as an individual actor is subordinated. Vimutti (emancipation) through mindfulness is the aim, but it can only be arrived at from the ethical foundation defined as sīla, morality, enshrined in the collective

discipline of the Vinaya. It is to the Sangha that the bhikkhu must surrender the vanity of self.

After the arrival of Ven Sumedho other Westerners began to seek out the master, Ajahn Chah, and to take up residence at Wat Pah Pong. In the meantime Sumedho, after spending seven years at the hermitage, was permitted to wander alone in India for five months keeping to the dhutaṅga rules of the lone ascetic. All meditating monks have in addition to the prescribed practices of the Vinaya a choice of following all or some of the thirteen practices known as dhutaṅga and enumerated in the Visuddimagga. The effect is that a bhikkhu's "virtue is thus washed clean of stain." [24] The most commonly adopted dhutaṅga practices involve eating only one meal a day and mixing all types of food in one bowl. These are anyway daily practices in Ajahn Chah's monasteries. A wandering bhikkhu is likely to practice open air dwelling, perhaps sleeping at the root of a tree or in a charnel ground. Another dhutaṅga to do with sleep is known as the sitter's practice and entails foregoing a recumbent posture. [25]

Ven. Sumedho's dhutaṅga practice was to wander alone with no money, and no stored food, eating only one meal a day of whatever could be obtained by mendicancy before noon of each day. [26] These wanderings are known in Thai as tudong. After his return to Wat Pah Pong Sumedho was charged by his teacher with the task of establishing a monastery for Western monks in what was reputedly a haunted forest a few kilometres away at Bung

Wai. The monastery was established partly through the instigation of the inhabitants of Bung Wai. The story was told to me by Ajahn Pabhakaro, an American who had found his way to Wat Pah Pong after service with the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry in Vietnam.

> "By that time there were ten or twelve Westerners, not all of them in robes, but there had been a significant increase. There were people from all walks of life and all parts of the world."

The Western monks needed to renew the protective coating that prevented their iron alms bowls from chipping and rusting. The process involved the use of bamboo and it was decided to go to Bung Wai which means Rattan Pond.

> "The villagers there were very supportive. They had plenty of bamboo and said that if the bowls were broken they would provide. Monks would go there quite often because it was a rather special alms round. It took so long to get there and back. But they (the villagers) would come over every observance day to keep the Precepts and to spend the day and night meditating. So that is where we decided to go...there were six of us. We spent the first night at the village monastery and the following day the villagers took us to the forest. Every village had a charnel ground where they do their cremation and bury the remains. This is what they had - about twenty acres of forest, so a perfect place for forest monks. So we put our little umbrellas in this place and got set to fire our bowls. Then one thing led to another. We stayed for about a week and when we were finished they wanted us to stay. They started talking about the Rains Retreat and building us huts. At that point we said we would have to consult Ajahn Chah. We also had to consult the head village monk who happened to be Ajahn Chah's preceptor. Anyway everyone approved so we stayed. The villagers built us huts and a simple grass meeting hall and that was the beginning. It became Wat Nanachat. Nana means international and chat means birth."

As Abbot of the new branch monastery Sumedho maintained the austere discipline of the mother monastery. The perceived extent of the Western monks' renunciation rendered them exceedingly worthy of dāna.

> "Thai people, local villagers at first and subsequently more cosmopolitan folk from Bangkok, were impressed by the presence of Western bhikkhus who had given up wealth, university education and the conveniences fo Europe and America to live a sweat soaked life that was austere even by the rustic tastes of north-east Thailand. Accordingly the monastery...was well supported and acquired a wealth of sponsorship that far exceeded the expectations of its Ajahn." [27}

As a consequence the monastery flourished and Jack Kornfield speaks of a "huge new forest preserve monastery with scattered cottages built into caves and in the hillside." [28]

Return to the West

In 1976 when Ajahn Sumedho stopped over in London after having visited his parents in the U.S. he telephoned the then Chairman of the English Sangha Trust, George Sharp to ask for a room at the virtually defunct Hampstead Centre. It was his first contact with the Trust and as a result George Sharp was invited to visit the Thai forest monasteries. The following year, 1977, Ajahn Chah, who had not previously travelled beyond Thailand, returned the visit arriving in London in the company of Ajahn Sumedho and three other Western bhikkhus.

For the first time Hampstead had a number of monks committed to strictly practising the Vinaya discipline. The Western bhikkhus were well trained in interpreting the details of the Vinaya and respectful of its traditions. At Ajahn Chah's insistence the alms round was continued each day, despite the incomprehension with which the line of straight-backed, undemonstrative bhikkhus was greeted by the majority of local people. Gradually a few British lay Buddhists adopted the custom of arriving at the time of the monks' departure in order to place <u>dāna</u> in their bowls. Invitations to speak at the Buddhist Society were taken up, but on the whole Ajahn Chah developed the strategy of maintaining a strict regime centred on the Hampstead premises in order to establish it as an authentic and fully functioning vihara that came to be known as Wat Dhammapadipa.

The monks rose at dawn, chanted the Pali texts, performed the alms round, ate a meal provided by a steadily increasing band of lay supporters, received visitors and performed evening chanting and meditation after which Ajahn Chah would sometimes give a sermon. Lay people were encouraged to attend the early morning and evening meditation sessions which were announced in the Buddhist Society's journal. On Ajahn Chah's return to Thailand Ajahn Sumedho was left in charge as Abbot to continue the newly established routine.

One reason for Ajahn Chah's confidence in maintaining the alms round was his belief that it provided regular

visual evidence of the bhikkhu's presence in the locality and opportunities to interact with those few strangers bold enough to approach. By persisting with the Thai custom of following a regular route certain people at least would grow accustomed to the sight of the strangely clad monks.

As a strategy it prompted an extremely fortuitous meeting with a jogger who frequented Hampstead Heath and got into the habit of chatting with the monks as they passed by. In 1978 he offered them several acres of woodland at Chithurst on the Hampshire Sussex border which he had recently inherited. By coincidence a large, derelict property adjacent to the woodland was simultaneously up for sale.

At this point the Sangha at Hampstead consisted of four bhikkhus, as the three Americans left behind by Ajahn Sumedho had been joined by an English monk Ven. Sucitto. There were also eight men in training for ordination. Some time was spent at the Buddhist Society's retreat house at Oken Holt in Oxfordshire, because conditions at Hampstead were beginning to be rather cramped. Furthermore, the bhikkhus did not, in their hearts, consider the Hampstead premises entirely suitable for a vihara, situated as it was opposite a noisy pub. Chithurst House, despite its dereliction seemed to the monks a more appropriate setting in view of their forest tradition. Some members of the Trust feared that a move to Sussex "meant deserting the faithful laity as well as depriving the Sangha of its

support." [29] The rent from 129 Haverstock Hill was still as important source of income for the Trust.

After much discussion the doubters were persuaded that at Chithurst "something approximating the atmosphere of a Thai monastery could be created." [30] The Hampstead property was sold and the proceeds used to purchase Chithurst House. The decision proved a wise one. The amount of work required to make the house fit for habitation provided lay people with an opportunity to become closely involved with the project so the number of supporters and helpers actually increased. Thai people living in Britain, although few in number, began to join in. Most significantly money to finance the extensive renovations started to arrive from Thailand. Wealthy Thais were glad to support the greatly revered disciples of Ajahn Chah, and in addition further the propagation of the Buddha Dhamma, with its universal saving principles "for the benefit of all sentient beings." As such the offerings were highly meritorious.

Expansion was rapid so that by the mid-summer the Sangha consisted of six bhikkhus and ten men and four women in training. Small numbers of lay people began to stay at the monastery for various periods of time and provided extra labour. Some residents of the well-to-do village of Chithurst expressed alarm at the arrival of a strange religious community in their midst. In order to allay these fears the Trust organised a public meeting at which Ajahn Sumedho explained the aims and mode of the monastic

life style. Slowly during the first few months local objections were overcome and the local council permitted a change of use order on the building now designated for religious purposes. The Buddhists themselves gave credit for overcoming local prejudice to the positive example of a life led according to the Vinaya:

> "The discipline with its emphasis on harmlessness and modesty again helped us out where no amount of teaching or Buddhist philosophy would have done - our neighbouring farmer, for example, had been impressed that, although we were not going to kill the rabbits that live on our property and invade his fields, we went to the trouble and expense of building a rabbit fence to keep them in. It was our effect on the environment and our neighbours that finally made the district council grant Chithurst House monastic status..." [31]

For a Buddhist vihara to have been granted monastic status formalised by special treatment under the rating system was one important step in establishing Buddhist monasticism in Britain. But historians of the Theravada tradition may wish to attach more significance to the consecration of an ordination boundary at Chithurst in a ceremony performed by a senior Sri Lankan bhikkhu, Ven. Anandamaitreya in June 1981. The boundary (sīmā) defining a consecration area for ordination and official Sangha functions meant that the British Sangha could now reproduce itself. On the same day Anandamaitreya conferred thera samati on Ajahn Sumedho, thus allowing him to act as upajjhāya (preceptor) with the authority to confer full ordination into the Buddhist Sangha. [32]

The following month three postulants were ordained as bhikkhus in front of a hundred lay people bringing the total number of bhikkhus dwelling at Chithurst to eleven. It had been possible to ordain monks in Britain prior to this event at the Buddhapadipa Temple or, or as in the previous year at Chithurst by using the river as a sima, with the Abbot of the Sri Lanka London Vihara, Ven. Dr. Saddhatissa acting as upajjhāya. Nevertheless, the consecration of the simā at Chithurst and the ensuing ordinations were perceived by many Buddhists as emblematic of the "true establishment of Buddhism in Britain." It seemed to them comparable to what occurred during the mission of the Arahat Mahinda, son of Emperor Asoka, to Sri Lanka in the third century B.C.

According to legend Mahinda told the king that Buddhism could be established on the island through the building of monasteries and shrines, but would not take root until "a Sri Lankan, born of Sri Lankan parents, took the robes in Sri Lanka, learned the discipline in Sri Lanka and recited it in Sri Lanka." [33] An article in the Buddhist Society Journal, The Middle Way, subsequent to the Chithurst ceremony indeed refered to the event in terms of Mahinda's mission, and also alluded to King Rama Khamheng's invitation to Sri Lankan forest monks to preside over and validate the ordination lineages initiated in Thailand in the thirteenth century [34]. Both these events were implicitly linked in the article to Ananda Metteyya's mission to Britain in 1908 and the eventual establishment

of the English Sangha Trust in 1956. Via this orientation towards the symbolic landmarks of Theravada history, the British converts were able to assert their own rightful place in the long narrative of Buddhist historiography.

The pages of The Middle Way became an important means for disseminating information about the Sangha's activities with the appearance of a Chithurst Newsletter section and articles were written by Ajahn Sumedho and other bhikkhus. Buddhist groups across the country that favoured the Theravada tradition began to look towards Chithurst as the authentic manifestation of the tradition in Britain. New groups were set up by Chithurst's far flung lay supporters, and therefore founded upon a direct relationship with the Sangha. One example of this type is the Bedford group. In a survey of 156 Buddhist Groups in Britain in 1980-81 Alison Church found that thirty six claimed to follow the Theravada tradition, with a further five claiming to be "partly Theravada". [35] Some of these groups began to receive the monks as speakers, visited the monastery, and offered dāna. Invitations from lay Buddhists in Devon and Northumberland for monks to live in their areas received a positive response and small branch viharas were founded.

Requests for Ajahn Sumedho to teach also increased. During her visit to Chithurst in 1981 Church recorded that Ajahn Sumedho had during the first seven months of the year taught in five different countries. In Britain he had led two ten day retreats largely composed of lay people, as well as supervising several weekend courses and visiting

numerous Buddhist societies as guest speaker. Other senior bhikkhus were also engaged in considerable travelling and teaching and in receiving the monastery's many guests. [36] All this activity began to threaten Chithurst's role as a training monastery and by the autumn of 1983 plans were announced to begin the search for additional premises "where lay people can go for systematic retreats and seminars." [37]

The upshot was the purchase of a large property to be known as Amaravati, translated as the Deathless Realm. It consists of seventeen buildings set in thirty acres of grounds in a rural pocket of Hertfordshire within easy driving distance of London. A long term mortgage of £135,000 was obtained and a new organisation The Friends of Amaravati was founded to raise donations and interest free loans, and to organise working weekends for lay people to assist, once again, with extensive renovations. Donations from Thailand formed an essential part in financing the project.

Amaravati opened in the summer of 1984 by which time the British Forest Sangha, as it had begun to call itself, consisted of 22 bhikkhus, five nuns, eighteen anagarikas and seven anagārikās. These last three categories were an entirely new departure for Theravada Buddhism.

Expansion Through Innovation

The most radical modification that the British Sangha instituted during its formative period was the sīladhara

ordination allowing women to seek dependence (Pali - nissaya) on the bhikkhu-saṅgha and on Ajahn Sumedho as their spiritual teacher (Pali - ācariya). The sīladhara ordinands are commonly known as nuns. They wear chocolate brown robes modelled on the bhikkhus robes, shave their heads and eyebrows and live as mendicants. All take Pali names and the title "sister" with which they address one another, and are likewise addressed by bhikkhus and lay people.

Sīladhara do not live by the pāṭimokkha rules of the traditional bhikkhunī-saṅgha (Assembly of Nuns) which is no longer extant. The nuns' order vanished from Sri Lankan Buddhism in the tenth century and eventually declined throughout South East Asia [38]. Since then women have had no real status within the Theravada Sangha. Any revival of the Theravada bhikkhunī order would require ordination through Mahayana bhikkhunī procedures. The British nuns live by a set of rules elaborated from the Ten Precepts of the male sāmaṇera (novice) ordination and informed by the spirit of the Vinayapitaka. so that their daily routine and general comportment parallels that of the bhikkhus in most respects.

In a later chapter I shall examine the position of women in Theravada Buddhism in some detail. For the moment I wish to concentrate on the less dramatic, but functionally vital, part played by the introduction by the British Sangha of a two- year form of postulancy applicable for nuns and monks. The male postulants are known as

anagarikas and the female as anagarikās. Both shave their heads and dress in white, the women in robes and the men in shirts and trousers. For formal occasions, including the morning and evening chanting, an outer robe, usually a white blanket, is worn folded across the shoulder.

The Vinaya rules do make provision for a novitiate status, that of the sāmaṇera, but in practice in Thailand the sāmaṇeras are usually under twenty years old and too young for full ordination. It is more usual for the sāmaṇera ordination (Pali - pabbajjā - going forth) and the bhikkhu ordination (Pali - upasampadā - acceptance) to be carried out in combination so that they form one ceremony. Ajahn Chah's policy at his forest monastery departed slightly from this norm in that he encouraged applicants for ordination to spend time at the monastery living under the Eight Precepts in order to prepare and to test their resolve. Temporary bhikkhu ordination, often lasting only three months, is common in the majority of the Thai monasteries functioning as a rite of passage for young men into adulthood. Temporary ordination is also regarded as an aspect of a young man's moral and sentimental education and a source of religious merit for him and his family [39]. The forest monasteries are less inclined to accept such applicants, preferring to encourage those with a longer term commitment.

In Britain the two year postulancy is an institutionalised extension of Ajahn Chah's informal policy. Here there is usually a period of preparation,

even before acceptance as an anagarika, when the lay candidate is encouraged to go on retreats and to live at the monastery. Anagarikas generally commit themselves to remain for one year, although they are free to leave at any time. At the end of the first year they may decide to carry on for a second, after which they can qualify for bhikkhu ordination. Putative bhikkhus are encouraged to view ordination as at least a five year commitment, but again there is no shame in disrobing at an earlier stage.

One monk described to me the period of his life when he began to consider becoming an anagarika:

> "There were two problems. I thought it might be too ascetic. I was used to quite a rich diet of sensory experience. The other thing was that there was a lot of fear of the unknown, of dying. I had this image of going into the monastery and a door closing behind and then you are just into the darkness and you will never come out. Yet on the other hand something was growing from my meditation...this inner pressure from the heart. I was really sick of worldliness."

He decided in discussion with senior bhikkhus not to join the monastery straight away, but to finish his degree course and to spend a year practising meditation and living by the Five Precepts to see whether "that feeling grew." Another monk also told me that on the advice of the monks he became stricter in his layman's practice of the Precepts and more disciplined about meditation before making his decision to become an anagarika.

At this stage there is not necessarily a determination to become a monk. Some anagarikas decide to adopt the white robes for a year as a way of serving the Sangha, and

of incorporating a better understanding of the Buddhist life into their future years as lay persons. Others have an open minded approach - "I am just here for as long as I can manage to stay," said one - while others are intent on receiving the bhikkhu ordination.

As novices the anagarikas are not provided with special classes or periods of instruction. A short handbook provides basic instruction concerning general procedures and appropriate modes of behaviour, such as modesty and respect. The anagarika is expected to learn the Pali chants and formulae, to be meticulous in carrying out duties, to understand the monks' rules, to assist in their maintenance and to treat monastery property with great care by "being receptive and attentive to the bhikkhu's needs." Induction into the way of life of the Sangha is thought to occur through close association and observation and by informal guidance from senior monks. The anagarikas are prompted to study a section of the Vinaya discipline known as the sekhiyā rules that guide the comportment of bhikkhus in relation to walking, sitting, and eating. One informant said he thought this was important because: "It is this movement towards what the bhikkhus do that creates a feeling that you are part of the Sangha."

In practical terms the fact that the novice is allowed to store and cook food has perhaps done the most to allow numbers of bhikkhus to live and practise in Britain. The bhikkhus are prevented by their rules from keeping or

preparing food and the problem of staffing monastery kitchens daily with sufficient volunteer lay persons could well have proved insurmountable. Technically the food in the monastery larders is said to be stored by the anagarikas who cook and offer it to the bhikkhus.

As a steward the anagarika is able to do many things that the bhikkhu is not permitted to do for himself, including the tasks involved in the woodland management work at Chithurst, such as chopping branches; gardening; gathering flowers for decorating the shrine room and rendering fruit edible by bhikkhus. To deprive a plant of life is an offence against the Vinaya, so fruit, seeds and the like must be "made available" by rendering them incapable of growth. Spoiling by flame is acceptable, but normally fruits are placed so that they are all touching and the anagarika cuts or skewers one of them saying "kappiyam bhante" (It is allowable Venerable Sir). The bhikkhu says simultaneously, "Kappiyam karomi" (Make it allowable).

Additionally, the anagarika can function as an intermediary between the bhikkhu and the laity, especially with regard to newcomers, by explaining the convention of the monastery. A bhikkhu is not permitted to sit in a room with a woman alone and anagarikas are there to act discretely as a chaperon if they see a danger of this happening. It is also up to the anagarika to arrange dāna with the laity and to suggest items that are required. Anagarikas also instruct the lay people how to request the

Five Precepts ceremony, how to ask a bhikkhu for a sermon and how to request monks to chant the blessings and protective verses (Pali - paritta).

The anagarika life is primarily directed towards a religious goal, "abiding in the spirit" through detachment from the world, even if it is not the radical renunciation of the bhikkhu. The anagarika normally retains his or her given name and is permitted to maintain control over personal money and property. He or she is maintained by the community being provided with food and shelter and, if necessary, the regulation white clothing and essential personal items. Anagarikas are discouraged from spending their own money on supplying the needs of the Sangha, however they are permitted to handle money including the petty cash supplied by the Trust for Sangha use. In extreme circumstances anagarikas can use this fund to buy food for the Sangha, but usually spend it on building materials or travel expenses for bhikkhus. These greater freedoms are not to be exploited for the anagarika's own purposes because, like all its members, he submits his "individual will to the authority of the community."

An anagarika of just over a year's experience explained how the role functions as an intermediary one between the bhikkhu and the lay person.

> "Ajahn Sumedho was very aware of what the difficulties were - taking the form (Vinaya) and trying to keep it in its South East Asian way, at least for the initial period until it can develop more organically. He knew how difficult it would be without there being some way of meeting the needs of the

> Sangha within the Sangha. The two roles, that of novice and that of steward to the bhikkhus are really a clever fusion, because you are both a member of the Sangha and a lay person. You are involved in both realms. As well as supporting the monks it is also a stepping stone into the bhikkhu-saṅgha."

In a short ceremony the anagarikas and anagarikas alike commit themselves in Pali to live by the Eight Precepts, that is the usual Five Precepts of the laity plus the undertaking to refrain from eating between noon and dawn the following day; to refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, smartening with perfumes and beautifying with cosmetics; to refrain from lying on a high or large sleeping place. The formula is based on the traditional rules for the upāsaka, the devout lay person who, in the Asian context, spends the night at a local monastery on special days of religious or personal significance and undertakes the additional precepts. {40]

In a guide issued to all new postulants (41) they are urged to reflect on the meaning of the Eight Precept formula:

> "The anagarika no longer has a place in the world, he is homeless and has chosen to abide in the spirit, in the qualities of wisdom and virtue. The eight precepts, the training rules, the routine, the submission of the individual will to the authority of the community are all troublesome to the worldly attitudes that we have trained in, but are completely conducive to a calm and happy spiritual life. So if you feel you are struggling against the discipline, reflect that this is a teaching, showing you what you are most attached to in the mortal condition. To let go is to discover great freedom. Freedom comes not from indulging

> in that which suffers, sickens and dies - it is the practice of mindfulness."

There is no doubt that the anagarika's place in the structure of the monastery has contributed significantly to the growth of the Sangha in Britain, firstly as a means of providing suitably motivated and trained candidates for the bhikkhu-sangha, and secondly as an enabling mechanism for overcoming the obstacles facing Theravada monks in a host culture. Because so many of the things that monks cannot do for themselves can be carried out by anagarikas, it has not been necessary always to have lay people around to smooth the way. In this sense the Sangha maintains a measure of practical independence. As an institutional adaptation the development of the anagarika status did not veer too wildly from traditional Theravada norms, incorporating as it does elements of the upāsaka and sāmaṇera roles, ensuring acceptance by Thai patrons and the Theravada ecclesiastical establishment.

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CHAPTER FOUR

TRUE INDIVIDUALS

Some of the founding members of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order had initially gathered around Sangharakshita during the Hampstead period, where they stood apart from those supporters of the English Sangha Trust who had been drawn from the ranks of the Buddhist Society. The founder members of the FWBO were mainly in their early twenties and had been attracted to Buddhism via that strand of sixties youth culture which combined the use of hallucinogenic drugs with a version or oriental mysticism. One informant reported:

> "There was a sort of rift between Sangharakshita and the Buddhist Society people. They felt he was attracting the wrong sort...all these hippies. They went for a middle class, conventional style...I was brought up on the highs of 1966 and 1967 which was when I was at university. After that I moved into politics and became quite frustrated."

Graham Kerr in his investigation of Buddhist Groups in Britain during the mid-seventies denied any relationship between conversion to Buddhism and youth culture in which drugs played a central part [1]. I received the opposite impression. My informants among the FWBO and the Theravada laity and Sangha not infrequently reported early experiments with drugs, as did Marilyn Goswell's sample of interviewees among twenty seven monks, nuns and anagarikas from the British Theravada Sangha. [2] Almost half of Goswell's interviewees mentioned taking drugs in their early twenties,

usually cannabis and psychedelic drugs such as L.S.D., rather than cocaine or heroin . They reported a range of experiences consistent with those discussed by some of my FWBO informants. Many of Goswell's informants seemed to regard drugs as "part of the scene" they were involved with at the time and as relatively unimportant to their future development, while one or two regarded their drug experiences as confusing. Others felt that drugs opened them up to "the possibility of other states of consciousness from ordinary every day ones." Those who found the experiences beneficial thought them so because they broke down previous conditioning, "opening you up to the unknown." One FWBO member told me:

> "I think with drugs you experience that your mind can be different. It is a very crude way of doing it. In retrospect it does have its destructive elements as well. It is not something that I would particularly promote, but it does make the idea available in some way. I do remember thinking that it would be good if one could enter those states of consciousness without recourse to drugs. I was certainly interested in meditation from the point of view of altered states of consciousness. It seemed to tie up with the late sixties, early seventies, culture."

The speaker is a hospital doctor who nowadays neither smokes nor drinks and whose clothes and domestic furnishings betray not even a hint of hippie exotica. His home is a mirror of the ambience that prevails at FWBO centres, with their uncluttered design, high quality workmanship and restrained colour schemes. He, like the Movement, had consciously shaken off his hippie origins, but was not adverse to admitting them as an "era that is now over."

For the past twelve years the doctor has been a Dharmachari, a title formed by a Sanskrit compound meaning one who walks or "fares" in the Dharma. The feminine equivalent is Dharmacharini. Both terms apply to persons who have been through the special ordination ceremony, designed by Sangharakshita, when the ordinand recites the Ten Precepts and asks for Refuge in the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, in much the same way that Buddhist novices have done since their inception. Although here Sangha has the extended meaning based on Sangharakshita's interpretation of the Ariya (Pali and Skrt - noble) Sangha, which traditionally refers to all who have a firm footing on the spiritual path. In Sangharakshita's recasting, Ariya Sangha refers to the Dharmacharis and the Dharmacharinis of the Western Buddhist Order. A member of the Western Buddhist Order does not wear the stitched yellow robe of the bhikkhu, but

> "...the ordinary lay dress of the society to which he belongs, though without the implication that because he is not a monk he must therefore be a layman in the traditional Buddhist sense." [3].

The outward sign of WBO ordination is the adoption of a Sanskrit or Pali name and the wearing of a white silk stole known as a <u>kesa</u>, the Japanese form of the Pali <u>kāsāya</u> meaning robe. Both are conferred at ordination during a private portion of the ceremony and the new name is announced during the public portion. Sangharakshita "stresses the death of the 'old' John or 'old' Kay or whoever, and the spiritual rebirth of the new Dharmachari or Dharmacharini." [4] The

kesa, which bears an emblem of the Three Jewels, is worn at FWBO and WBO events.

The FWBO exists to support Order Members and their "work in propagating the benefits of Buddhism." [5] In addition it provides a structure whereby people can make initial contact with the Order and train for entry into it. It is possible to remain a member of the FWBO without entering the Order, but in practice people are encouraged to prepare for ordination. When the two organisations are mentioned together they are spoken of as the Movement, a convenient device I too shall adopt. For members the term has an additional weighting drawing on the dynamic implications of the verb to move, as in the following example:

> "We want the circle of that Movement to spread ever more widely until it begins to exert an appreciable influence on quite a large number of people, so that the world can be moved out of its present state of negativity, into and onto a much, much more positive channel." [6]

There are three distinct levels of involvement in the FWBO, firstly as someone who attends classes at centres and gives some general help and support at peripheral levels; these people are known as Friends. A deeper level of commitment is represented by the Mitra (Skrt - friend) section. These are people who having made initial contact with the FWBO, usually through one of the twelve urban centres, opt for a more intense involvement. Becoming a Mitra is marked by a communal ceremony. There are four main requirements for Mitra applicants. 1. The Mitra will no longer cast around other religious movements and will regard

the FWBO as a "spiritual home" 2. He/she accepts the values of meditation as a "tool" for attaining higher levels of consciousness and intends to practice meditation. 3. The Mitra is prepared to further the work of the FWBO. 4. The Mitra is prepared to keep regular contact with members of the Order.

After some time a Mitra may apply to Sangharakshita, as Protector of the Order and President of the FWBO, for permission to become ordained. The request is not granted at once, but precipitates a shift to a level of preparation known as "the ordination process," with special study courses and retreats culminating in the ordination ceremony. In all possible cases male Mitras are expected to spend a three month preparatory retreat at a special centre in Southern Spain known as Guhyaloka, from the Sanskrit meaning concealed or secret realm, or world. In some but not all cases, the cost of the long retreat is financed through work in the FWBO movement, or in one of the FWBO businesses.

Each of the urban FWBO centres is an autonomous charity and there is no legal incorporation as a whole. Five Order Members are generally required to set up a centre. Where there are fewer, activities are carried out as a branch of a parent centre. The Order itself is organised into local chapters that are associated with centres. A council of between five and fifteen members is elected annually to run the centre. Where willing and available Order members are lacking, Mitras may be elected to the council. The council is headed by a chairman and is responsible for running

activities at the centre. Sangharakshita is president of each of the centre councils. The secretary of the council is responsible for the day to day implementation of plans and the running of the centre, a task he tends to share with the chairman. During the period of research all chairmen of British centres were actually men. The chairman is perceived as being more than an administrator, and is expected to display spiritual qualities that will inspire others and set the tone for the centre. Most chairman attend regular meetings with their fellow chairmen four times a year, with one meeting lasting for two weeks. At present there are centres in east London, west London, Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Croydon, Glasgow, Accrington, Leeds, Manchester and Norwich.

There are four main retreat centres in rural areas where retreats are organised for members of the Movement from all levels. One, Taraloka, is for women only and is run by women. The chairwoman attends the quarterly meetings alongside one other woman who holds the chair at a centre in Holland. The retreat centre is tied to an urban centre, but the rest are self-financing.

Urban centres are often supported by what are known as Right Livelihood businesses in which FWBO members work on a team basis, with the emphasis on ethical livelihood aimed at contributing to "personal development." At the beginning of my research in 1985 all these businesses were co-operatives registered under the Friendly Societies Act and, with one modification adopted model rules for worker co-operatives

devised by the Industrial Common Ownership Movement. Restaurants, wholefood shops, printing, gardening, building and publishing are typical Right Livelihood businesses. Due to administrative and tax advantages the ICOM structure is currently being abandoned. The charitable associations that legally constitute centres are being turned into limited companies, while remaining registered as charities. The co-operatives are to be converted into ordinary limited companies and the shares donated to local centres. Directors of the trading companies will be appointed by the directors of the charities, that is the centres. Ostensibly the aim is that the businesses will be managed along co-operative lines. FWBO members commonly spend some time living in men only or women only communes known within the Movement as "single sex." In 1985 twenty communities existed with the largest numbering twenty five members and the smallest a group of five. Some consist entirely of Order members and Mitras, others also accommodate Friends. The issue of ethical businesses and collective working and living in the FWBO will be more fully explored in Chapter Nine.

The FWBO has no official total membership statistics, but the outreach of centres in Britain is such that some few thousand people are estimated to be in contact at any one time. According to the Mitra Convener, whose job it is to co-ordinate the Mitra system world wide, there were around 700 Mitras in 1988. Up until September 1990 there were 192 men and sixty women Order Members in Britain out of a total of 403 Order Members across the globe. The largest number

outside of Britain are to be found in India where there are eighty one Order Members of whom only three are women. Small numbers are found in four European countries (Sweden, Finland, Holland, Germany and Spain) the U.S. and Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia.

Via the teachings of Sangharakshita the FWBO embraces all three major strands of Buddhism, the Theravada, the Mahāyāna schools and the Vajrayāna teachings. Distinctions are drawn between the different traditions, but the Ekayāna, the One Way, regards these differences as representing separate stages along the one spiritual path of "Going for Refuge."

Going for Refuge

In both the Mahayana and Theravada traditions of Buddhism the most repeated ritual and central expression of belief is the expression of a formula known as Going For Refuge. The formula in Pali is repeated three times as follows:

> Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi / I go to the Buddha for refuge.
>
> Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi / I go to the Dhamma for refuge.
>
> Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi / I go to the Sangha for refuge.

Gombrich maintains that "the taking of the Refuges is what defines a Buddhist." [7] Such a generalised definition becomes in Sangharakshita's model the sole definition, so

that in his view it is not possible to be a Buddhist by birth:

> "People in Buddhist countries who say they are Buddhist by birth are no better than the ancient Brahmins who said they were Brahmins by birth. What it really means is that Buddhism, so called, has simply become Brahmanism. This is a very important point. The Going For Refuge must be real Going For Refuge. If you are a Buddhist it must be on account of your own, individual, independent volition - your own understanding. Thus you cannot be born a Buddhist. If you think you can, you are still on the level of 'provisional' Going For Refuge, the significance of which is cultural rather than genuinely spiritual." [8]

Going For Refuge is the central act of the Buddhist life and the single unifying factor, which Sangharakshita argues to have held sway during the Buddha's own lifetime, thus he sees no need for the Theravada emphasis on monasticism as the *summum bonum* of religious life. In Sangharakshita's opinion monasticism creates an artificial and erroneous division:

> "For the Theravadins there are two kinds of people: the monks and the lay people. On this side there are monks. who are the "real" Buddhists: on that side the lay people, who are not so 'real' Buddhists. One could even speak of them as the first-class Buddhists and the second-class Buddhists. Sometimes the difference seems to be almost as great as that!
>
> "Looking at things from a different point of view, however and seeing them more as they were in the Buddha's day, one might say that though there certainly is a difference, it is not of a different kind. The real difference is not between monks and lay people but between those who Go for Refuge and those who do not Go for Refuge. Whether you are a monk who Goes for Refuge - a man who Goes for Refuge or a woman who Goes for Refuge - it is of secondary importance. That you live in a certain kind of way, or follow a certain discipline, is of secondary importance. What

> is of over-riding importance is your common spiritual commitment, your common Going For Refuge. This is why in the FWBO we have a sort of slogan: 'Going for Refuge - or commitment - is primary: life style is secondary!'" [9]

Paradoxically, of course, ways of life do emerge from the primary commitment to spiritual values. All who come into contact with the Movement are encouraged to live their lives according to Ten Precepts which come in both prescriptive and proscriptive forms. The former are the Ten *kushala-dharmas* (Skrt - skilful forms) and the latter are the Ten *akushala-dharmas* (Skrt - unskilled forms). As outlined by Sangharakshita and expounded upon in his *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism* the list may be summarised as follows: 1. Deeds of loving kindness; refrain from killing live beings. 2. Open handed generosity; refrain from taking the not given. 4. Truthful communication; abstention from false speech. 5. Kindly and gracious speech; abstention from harsh speech. 6. Meaningful speech; abstention from frivolous speech. 7. Harmonious speech; abstention from slanderous speech. 8. Abandoning covetousness for generosity; abstention from covetousness. 9. Changing hatred to love; abstention from hatred. 10. Wisdom; abstention from false views.

As the canonical sources for the Ten Precepts Sangharakshita cites the *Sevitabbha-asevitabbha-sutta* of the Pali Tipiṭaka as well as the Mahāyāna sutras, the *Vimalakīrtinideśa* and *Suvarnapraphāṣa Sūtra* [10]. He speaks of the Ten Precepts as the "prolongation of the act of Going for Refuge into every aspects of one's existence," [11] corresponding to the traditional three-fold Buddhist analysis

of the human being into the elements of body, speech and mind. The application of the Ten Precepts reduces the traditional Buddhists socio-religious categories of monk, novice, upāsaka (pious layman) and ordinary layman to one single category, even if there are degrees within the category. One set of rules applies to all and so

> "represents a return to, and a renewed emphasis upon the basics of Buddhism. It can be regarded as innovation only by adopting a standpoint from within which those basics are ignored or from which they cannot be seen for the accretions and excrescences by which they have become overlaid." [12]

The Ten Precepts are to be viewed as totally comprehensive in scope, while some of the monastic precepts are of no real ethical significance but "demonstrably the product of social conditions prevailing at the time of the Buddha or shortly afterwards."

Sangharakshita accuses the modern Theravada monastic Sangha of confusing Going for Refuge with becoming a monk. Westerners in search of an emblem of exemplary Buddhist behaviour, and a model upon which to fix their spiritual aspirations, should eschew the bhikkhu in favour of the Bodhisattva, the Buddha in the making, who delays nirvana when in his reach and abandons the world but not the beings in it.

The Bodhisattva Ideal

The Bodhisattva figure is present in the early Buddhist period and has a place in the Theravada tradition, where in the legendary stories of the Buddha Sakyamuni's previous

lives (Pali - jātaka) he is seen as an aspirant Buddha, heroic and self-sacrificing. In the later Mahāyāna schools the Bodhisattva figure was extensively embellished and became the focus of devotional and meditational practices. The Sanskrit word Bodhisattva is a compound made up of bodhi meaning Enlightenment of the Buddha, and sattva, denoting living being. It permits a dual meaning, referring either to a person who is seeking Enlightenment or a person who embodies Enlightenment and is thus destined to attain Buddhahood. The tradition also recognises another interpretation that is "one whose mind (sattva) is fixed on bodhi." [13] Edward Conze describes the Bodhisattva as the Ideal Man of the Mahāyāna and points out that the term was translated in the Tibetan texts to mean literally Heroic Being. [14]

Prior to the emergence of the Mahāyāna early Buddhists developed a cult around a Bodhisattva known as Maitreya (Skrt - loving kindness). Maitreya as a future Buddha is destined to renew the Dharma (Pali - dhamma) which inevitably declines because the world is caught up in cycles of destruction and renewal. As such it is an "impure" realm of existence. David Snellgrove explains:

> "As Sakyamuni was never regarded as the one and only Buddha, but rather as one in a whole series (seven are named in early texts, but the number is gradually much extended), each of whom appears in a separate world age, it was inevitable that his followers should come to expect a Buddha for the next world age..." [15]

All the later extravagant developments of the Mahayāna are traceable to tendencies inherent in the earliest known forms of Buddhism. Mahāyānists differed "in their philosophical assumptions and the manner in which they applied the Bodhisattva theory to normal religious life." [16]

Taking their evidence from the examination of the texts, scholars have concluded that in the earliest period:

> "...the liberation of beings other than Buddhas seems to have entailed insight into the same truths as those discovered by the Buddhas, that is, the tradition initially appears to have discerned little difference in the content or depth of their awakening. However, profound differences remained in the religious paths taken by the respected practitioners.
>
> "The path of those who merely heard the Buddha preach, the so called śrāvakas, or 'listeners" was held to culminate not in Buddhahood, but in the attainment of arhatship. Unlike a Buddha an arhat (Pali - arahant) comes close to the Dhamma through hearing it preached by others, he does not participate in the cosmic drama that results in the appearance of a Buddha in the world...The Mahāyāna texts propose that the end of religious practice properly conceived is nothing less than the universal insight achieved by the Buddha, that is the goal of religious practice ought to be Buddhahood itself." [17]

That this is a serious, if long term, aspiration on the part of members of the FWBO is exemplified by a quotation from The Guardian newspaper in which a Mitra states: "Buddhism has a lot to say about society but focuses on individual change. I want to become a Buddha however many lifetimes it takes me." [18] The aspiration itself is known as the bodhicitta (Skrt - thought of enlightenment) and is

the beginning of the Bodhisattva path. The Mahāyāna universe contains numerous Bodhisattvas who are well advanced along the path and are conceived as quasi-celestial beneficent beings. Certain Bodhisattvas became associated with particular Buddhas as Mahāyāna cosmology developed to incorporate the idea that the universe is composed of myriads of world systems or Buddha-fields (Skrt - buddhakṣetra) where the Buddhas, surrounded by Bodhisattvas, continue to preach simultaneously. [19] Pure Buddha-fields contain only Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, while impure fields such as our own world contain beings of all kinds at all stages of spiritual advancement and decline. Bodhisattvas may travel miraculously from one Buddha-fieled to another. Three Bodhisattvas eventually came to greatest prominence:

> "...chief of whom from the earthly point of view is Avalokiteśvara ("The Lord Who Looks Down"), also called Padmapāni ("The Lotus Bearer"). His special attribute is compassion, and his helping hand reaches even to Avici, the deepest and most unpleasant of the Buddhist purgatories. Another important Bodhisattva is Mañjusrī, whose special activity is to stimulate the understanding, and who is depicted with a naked sword in one hand, to destroy error and falsehood, and a book in the other, describing the ten paramitas, or great spiritual perfections which are the cardinal virtues developed by bodhisattvas. Vajrapāni, a sterner Bodhisattva, is the foe of sin and evil, and like the god Indra, bears a thunderbolt in his hand." [20]

Sangharakshita sees the Western Buddhist Order as "constituting a tiny reflection of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, in his eleven-headed, thousand armed form." [21]

An article by Order Member, Nagabodhi, expresses the idea of the reality of the aspiration to become a Bodhisattva as well as acceptance of the idealised conception of the celestial Bodhisattva.

> "The arising of the Bodhicitta is not a myth or a symbol. While its birth may be in the words of Shantideva, 'an unprecedented wonder,' it is nevertheless a fact of the spiritual life. Bodhisattvas have and do walk this earth." [22]

Later in the same article he writes:

> "We may be fortunate enough to meet a living Bodhisattva; or in meditation we may meet and commune with Bodhisattvas of the archetypal plane, like Tara, Avalokiteshvara, and Manjushri. By involving ourselves in a vital, outward going spiritual community like the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order we may discover that we are already participating in the life of the Bodhisattva: co-operating with an impersonal force in the world for the benefit of all." [23]

The Bodhisattva "within" is assisted by the Bodhisattva without, the cosmic figure who "as it were descends to pull us up by his outstretched hand." [24] All who identify with the Bodhisattva share his purpose and are instruments of his compassion. These ideas remain firmly rooted within the mainstream of the Mahāyāna, which is in any case a broad and multifaceted tradition, ranging from the spare insights of Zen to the devotionalism of the Pure Land sects. What is radical and novel about Sangharakshita's exposition of the Bodhisattva doctrine is its axiomatic dependence on evolutionary theory and Western humanist philosophy.

Contingent upon biological evolution, Sangharakshita posits a second stage of evolution which he terms the Higher

Evolution. By whatever mechanism, evolution has brought human beings to a position of reflexivity and self consciousness. The human is an animal that is yet more than an animal due to the presence of these capacities, yet in most people they remain rudimentary. Looked at in this way evolution is not primarily the development of more complex biological forms, but the development of "higher and higher levels of consciousness." [25] A Buddha stands in relation to human beings in a similar position vis a vis humans and animals.

> "He too represents a new mutation, a new species, a new category of existence, a human being,but at the same time infinitely more than a human being, an Enlightened human being, a Buddha." [26]

The Higher Evolution is achieved through the self-determined "will to Enlightenment." Once self consciousness is cultivated human beings can begin to co-operate with evolutionary processes and by their efforts attain Transcendent Consciousness. Upward evolution requires the evolving entity to chose to intervene and direct his or her personal evolution towards the potentialities actualised by the Buddha. In so doing one becomes the True Individual, twin to the Bodhisattva whose energies are engaged not only to ensure his own evolution, but that of all beings. The whole of existence can, in time, proceed to the Higher Evolution. The precise means for this are described by Sangharakshita as the Spiral Path, which incorporates the Buddhist teaching of the law of dependent origination (Pali - paṭiccasamuppāda). The law of dependent origination explains

the causes of suffering and dissatisfaction that are intrinsic to life as a series of links in a self perpetuating chain. In the Samyutta Nikaya of the Pali canon is a version of the causal series of links (Pali - _nidāna_) showing how happiness, as opposed to suffering, arises. Sangharakshita accuses the Theravada tradition of paying insufficient attention to this text which he describes as the "positive and progressive aspect" of the _paṭiccasamuppāda_ [27]. In the FWBO the "negative" _nidānas_, the links that explain suffering, are associated with the lower evolutionary scheme inasmuch as they represent ignorance (Pali - _avijjā_) and are conceived as a wheel that constantly turns upon itself. The momentum of the "positive" _nidānas_ explain the origin of creation, but they are seen as a feature of "lower evolutionary forms" to the extent that craving, ignorance and attachment deter progress in the development of consciousness. The "positive" _nidānas_ are presented as a blue print for evolution which is to be deliberately cultivated and cannot be left to natural selection. This is a task for heroic individuals.

Sangharakshita's theory of the individual is constructed of three distinct, if not entirely separable, strands. The first views the individual in relation to the collective. The second views the individual as psychological and self actualising; the third, as a metaphysical and spiritual entity. The ensuing illustration advances all three perspectives.

Mitrata is the title of a series of handbooks designed for the study course devised for Mitras. The handbooks are, however, available to all comers and are sold by post and at centres. Mitrata No.17 is entitled The True Individual. The cover is divided into four squares. In the top left hand corner several sheep are depicted following one another through a gate. A sheep in the centre of the group is a ram. The picture in the top right hand corner of the square is identical except for the ram whose forelegs appear to be metamorphosing into a pair of forearms. In the bottom left hand corner the ram has become half man half beast with a human head, face and trunk . He has feet and arms, one of which he needs to support himself, the other raised in salutation to the image in the adjacent square whose radiance flashes its light across him, for in the final picture the ram has become a naked man, upright with arms outstretched, exuding luminous energy. He bestrides the word INDIVIDUAL, which alone appears capitalised in the title.

Within the pages of The True Individual we are presented with a picture of the primitive individual as a unit embedded in a social group bonded by "material" ties such as territory, kinship and economic interests. It is acknowledged that a person may belong to various groups simultaneously that "overlap and cohere" to form a world. Nevertheless it is the world of the "statistical individual" who has no existence of his or her own apart from the group, and who therefore possess "no real, no true individuality." For people embedded in groups self consciousness is

rudimentary and remains so. But it is possible to perfect self conscious awareness and assert one's own true individuality, despite group pressures to conform. Only after this is achieved can one aspire to develop "transcendental consciousness," that is an "awareness of the higher spiritual reality which embraces both oneself and the whole of conditioned existence." The final stage is Absolute Consciousness or Enlightenment.

As the first important step in the nurture of self consciousness, as opposed to the purely animal "sense consciousness," attention must be paid to personal development achieved through study, meditation, reflection, devotion, service to others, attending solitary and collective retreats and, above all, by following the Ten Precepts. Caution must be exercised, because in emancipating oneself from the dominance of the group the individual employs rational thinking which can in excess, and without balancing existential factors, lead to "individualism as opposed to individuality." To avoid this trap the emergent individual must contact and experience feelings and emotions, including the repressed negative emotions that are said to undergird "alienated awareness."

The Spiritual Community

The appropriate context for the nurture of individuality is the spiritual community, which Sangharakshita defines as consisting of people who have made an individual choice and an individual decision:

> "They have accepted responsibility for their own lives, and have decided that they want to develop as human beings, want to grow. The spiritual community is not, therefore a group in the ordinary sense. It is not something collective, with a collective mind or soul. It has no collective identity in which you lose your own, or in which you become submerged. The spiritual community is a voluntary association of free individuals who have come together on account of a common commitment to a common ideal: a commitment to what we call the Three Jewels." [28]

Certainly those many people whom I met and talked to, including those I formally interviewed, did not seem to have lost their identity, nor to have personalities that were "submerged" in the Movement. They appeared to me as a rather colourful collection of people, with well defined personalities and representative of a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, past and present occupations and other activities. What they seemed most commonly to share in their histories was a critical approach towards perceived flaws in contemporary society variously and loosely identified as crass materialism, alienation and ecological disorder. Many suggested - and it was confirmed in several life histories - that they possessed these attitudes prior to contact with the FWBO, and several had been associated with radical causes such as animal rights, nuclear disarmament, feminism, socialism, communism and ecology.

I would agree with Goodman that as far as the FWBO is concerned it is difficult to define a "typical convert" and that "those who joined the Movement manifestly did not come from homogeneous backgrounds." [29] Of the twenty nine people with whom I carried out taped interviews seventeen had

completed courses in higher education. One had dropped out of a degree course in physics, and of the remaining eleven, three had left school without any qualifications. Of the same twenty nine interviewees, seven were not in full time employment outside the home, four were women caring for families and one a man experiencing long term unemployment. Thirteen worked full time either in FWBO businesses or in some other capacity within the Movement. Of those in outside employment the occupations given were artist (2), school teacher, joiner. industrial trainer, laboratory assistant, public relations worker, hospital doctor and T'ai Chi teacher. Of the two who were retired one had taught business studies at a college of Further Education and the other had been an insurance salesman.

Despite the obvious diversity that characterises its membership the Movement is not so individualistically intentional as its own ideology would wish, or as is proclaimed by Sangharakshita in the previous quotation. Mary Douglas vigorously asserts intentionality is not a satisfactory explanation of collective action. She criticises fellow anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown for his failings on this count:

> "He says that the faithful have collaborated in order to create something they all want, and he assumes that they were successful. But this is precisely what has to be explained." [30]

In the same way Sangharakshita's comment that the FWBO is a voluntary association of individuals clustered around a "common commitment to a common ideal" and not a group "in the

ordinary sense" lacks explanatory power. In as far as it goes Sangharakshita's assertion may be true, but it fails to illuminate the matter of how association is achieved and the effect that association has on those who collaborate. As it is, new members voluntarily contract into a pre-existent order, with a set of distinctive beliefs, assumptions and agreed principles. Even though that order exists through the consensus of its members it is inevitably a source of influence upon them through its collective representations. As Douglas has it,

> "...each kind of community is a thought world, expressed in its own thought style, penetrating the minds of its members, defining their experiences, and setting the poles of their moral understanding." [31]

Most of what follows will demonstrate that the Movement may be considered in this light as a fully-fledged sub-culture with a systematic ideology and institutional forms that sustain patterns of individual interaction. The distinction between the Order and the FWBO is a fundamental and crucial one. It is the Order members who "initiate, inspire, lead and direct the FWBO's activities." (32) According to Sangharakshita "the spiritually committed" Order members have "the deciding voice in everything," (33) while final authority rests with him.

Initially decision making within the Order was the result of face to face contact as numbers were small. The first convention of the Order took place in the front room of a house in Purley at the beginning of 1974, and even now with, larger numbers, decision making depends on consensus

obtained through networks of meetings, conventions and communication channels. Order Members are organised into local chapters, meeting once a week for meditation, a puja ceremony and discussion. Where there are sufficient numbers of males and females the chapters are "single-sex". For instance in Norwich there is a men's chapter and a women's chapter. Each chapter has a convener who contacts other chapter conveners if matters arise which it is felt should be more widely discussed. One weekend each month Order Members meet at either regional or national level and every two years there is an international convention. Special retreats are organised for Order Members who also maintain contact through a monthly newsletter Shabda, which contains reports of Order meetings around the world as well as open letters from individual members. The contents of the letters range from chatty accounts of personal life to descriptions of dreams and criticisms of conduct within the Order. Theoretically, all areas of an Order members life should be open to all other Order members.

Some Dharmacharis are described as "Senior Order Members," but just how this appellation is arrived at is somewhat unclear. One informant told me:

> "It (a Senior) is someone who, for whatever reason stands out as having certain qualities, and is fulfilling quite central functions within the Movement, people like Subhuti, who has written two books. But there is also a great deal of diversity of opinion as to whether their views and ways of operating are actually what we want to see the Movement carrying on with. So I think it is an incredibly open question."

Another, generally regarded as a Senior Order member largely due to his proximity to Sangharakshita said of the term:

> "It has a variable meaning. It is usually somebody who has been ordained for eight or ten years, but some people are regarded as having seniority who have been ordained for less. It depends on them as individuals...it is more the response that everyone else has to them and their own confidence. If Sangharakshita starts calling someone a Senior Order Member then that would add weight."

The fate of the Order once Sangharakshita, now in his sixties, is no longer alive and present as the source of authority is a much discussed issue. There is a sense that the Order should be preparing itself for this eventuality, especially with regard to future ordinations. The issue began to be problematic when the requests for ordinations began to increase (110 men and between seventy and eighty women in 1988) and changes to the system occurred during the period of fieldwork. In 1985 three British Order members were authorised by Sangharakshita to ordain sixteen new male Order members in India. Subhuti, who was one of the three, explained the situation as it was at the time of our interview in the Summer of 1988.

> "The main institutional responsibility he (Sangharakshita) has is giving ordination. People have deputized for him, but they haven't actually given ordination in their own right. He agreed that these people should be ordained. He gave us the responsibility to say 'no,' but not to say 'yes'. If we don't feel people are ready we can say 'no", but we can't say 'yes' to anyone from a list of applications. Some Order Members are going to have to develop a strong spiritual connection with those who are coming up for ordination so that they can fulfil that function."

Mitras who have requested ordination and have completed, or are near completion, of the three year study course are invited to attend a special retreat run by Senior Order members, after which they will be told if they are considered ready for ordination. One Mitra that I spoke to was about to go on his third ordination selection retreat. However, the "gift" of ordination remained within Sangharakshita's dispensation. In 1989 the situation changed. Sangharakshita handed a share of the authority to dispense ordination to Subhuti and one other senior Order Member, Suvajra, who between then admitted seven men to the Order. In his address to a gathering in April 1990 of some two hundred Order Members in Manchester, to mark the twenty second anniversary of his founding of the Order, Sangharakshita described the designation of Subhuti and Suvajra as "preceptors" as "...one lamp being lit from another, the first lamp 'transmitting' light to the other without thereby losing its own light..." He spoke of how his role as a teacher had been taken up by Senior Order Members who acted as teachers to junior Order Members, and that they had further elucidated the Dharma initially elucidated by himself. Providing that the new teachers acted "in accordance with the spirit of my elucidations" they could be seen in direct relationship to himself. "This is the way a tradition - a lineage begins to develop." [34] During the talk Sangharakshita did not touch upon what might happen regarding the leadership of the Order in the event of his death, but by calling upon the notion of lineage he hinted at

a Buddhist tradition whereby senior disciples of a meditation master or respected teacher are acknowledged as being legitimatized by their association with him. Precisely which of those disciples go on to take up leading roles tends to depend on their inclinations and personal charisma. Subhuti and Suvajra as the first "preceptors" other than Sangharakshita himself have already received substantial legitimation as future leaders of the Movement, but others may also eventually be made preceptors if the need arises. Women's ordinations are still to be decided upon by Sangharakshita, but I am informed that this is likely to change in the near future.

Finding an heir, or heirs, for the leadership of a movement founded on charismatic authority, which in the case of the FWBO and WBO has been vested in Sangharakshita by his followers, is frequently a process involving institutional change. Max Weber, originator of the theory of charismatic authority describes the problem thus:

> "It is usually the wish of the Master himself, and always that of his disciples and, even more of his charismatically led followers to change charisma and the charismatic blessings of his subjects from a once and for all, extremely transitory free gift of grace belonging to extraordinary times and persons into a permanent everyday possession. The inexorable concomitant of this change however, is a change in the inner character of the structure. The mode of existence of charisma is always overtaken by the conditions of everyday life and the forces that dominate them...especially economic interests." [35]

For Weber the turning point comes when the charismatic followers and disciples become "marked out as having special modes of access to the leader followed by their appointment

as special full time functionaries." This is undoubtedly the case with the FWBO. At the outset all Order Members, Mitras and Friends had personal access to Sangharakshita. As the Movement grew the majority maintained contact with him through correspondence, but now even this is difficult and while they write to him it is impossible for him to reply personally to all the letters. The result is that an inner circle of Order Members have more regular contact with Sangharakshita who lives for part of the year at Padmaloka, a retreat centre in Norfolk and location of the Order Office or secretariat. The rest of the time he spends in a flat attached to the London Buddhist Centre or sometimes in his quarters at Guhyaloka.

The number of Order Members working full time for the Movement varies according to the availability of income generated by the FWBO businesses, centres and fund raising ventures and donations. Many of the chairmen of centres are full time workers, as are the staff of retreat centres. Padmaloka had about twenty full time workers at the time of my visits in 1988. The general aim is to increase the numbers of Order Members able to apply their energies fully to the development of the Movement.

At present decision making occurs within face to face meetings be they the local chapter, the centre council, or the chairmen's retreat, and is implemented by general consensus. Each centre is of course autonomous, but secured to the Order by a preponderance of Order members sitting on the centre's administrative council. The chairman is

invariably an Order member. The minutes of each centre's council meetings are circulated to other centre councils and organisations within the Movement, and feedback is encouraged in the form of comments and suggestions. Subhuti told me:

> "There is a general acknowledgement that one must not innovate too wildly and before making any major innovations one would seek views from other Order Members. That would apply to persons and institutions."

Within the Movement there is a quasi-hierarchical structure which ascribes authority to senior Order Members over their juniors. This depends upon the juniors accepting that their seniors are more "spiritually mature," even though seniors may not be older in years than those who have come lately. All of this exactly parallels the quasi-hierarchy of the bhikkhu-saṅgha where relations are based on respect for seniors according to a general consensus as long as the behaviour of the senior in question remains within expected bounds. In the FWBO Mitras are meant to be able to regard Order Members with a similar respect to that which junior Order members might hold for seniors. Order Members are meant to help Mitras towards their aspirations for ordination and to encourage Friends to take steps towards becoming Mitras.

Another echo of the bhikkhu-saṅgha way of doing things is the way that the Movement seeks to establish solidarity through a form of inter-personal relationship known as kalyāṇa mitratā, a Sanskrit term usually translated within the FWBO as "spiritual friendship". Mention was made in the previous chapter of the traditional requirement of spiritual

friendship as an aspect of Theravada monastic life. Steven Collins describes the monastic conception of kalyāṇa mitratā as being "not seen as an end in itself; it is a means to the individual end of nirvana, or perhaps better it is the milieu in which that end is realised by individuals." [36] The FWBO share this and other ideals with the monastic tradition, especially the view of the process by which mutual affection and harmony "become allied to the solidarity which arises from the same doctrinal allegiance." [37] In the FWBO shared commitment to the Three Jewels is what is thought to make spiritual friendship possible.

Collins reminds us that in the monastic context the term kalyāṇa mitratā once "more widely indicated a senior monk who encourages and advises his fellows." [38] The abstract noun, which Collins loosely renders "good friendship" (Pali - kalyāṇamitta/tā) he says "should in fact be translated in the passive "having good friendship" as it refers to the virtue shown by a junior monk in being ready to accept the advice and encouragement of his more senior "adviser monks" (ovādakabhikkhu). A closely related and in some contexts almost synonymous virtue is sovacassatā, literally "easiness to speak to."

One important reading of spiritual friendship in the FWBO relies precisely on this interpretation, especially with reference to friendship between a Mitra and an Order member. In theory every ordinand is expected to have two kalyāṇa mitrās, but this has not always worked out in practice. A review of the ordination process, as it is called, has

reaffirmed the importance of these relationships to the ordinand and Sangharakshita is now to personally validate the selection of *kalyāṇa mitras* and assess their compatibility with the Mitra concerned.

Each chapter of the Order has a local Mitra Convener whose job it is to encourage his fellow Order Members to develop one to one Friendships with Mitras. He acts informally as there are no formal or bureaucratic channels to maintain this system, which is one of the reasons why it has broken down in the past. It is also the task of the chapter's Mitra Convener to bring up the subject of the progress of Mitras at chapter meetings and to send a quarterly report on the progress of each Mitra to the Order Office at Padmaloka, where it is available to the overall Mitra Convener. At the time of my fieldwork there was a full time overall Mitra Convener responsible for all male mitras, and although there was a female equivalent to oversee the interests of the women Mitras she was not financed to work full time. It was hoped to remedy this situation especially because the numbers of women applying for ordination is on the increase.

The review of the relationship between Mitras and Order Members emerged from a general dissatisfaction with what was seen as the general inadequacy of contact between them. General criticisms were made against male Order Members for preferring to spend time with girlfriends rather than the Mitras for whom they were responsible. Among some Order Members homosexual relations are deemed to be a legitimate

expression of kalyāṇa mitratā, while heterosexual relations are considered to be rarely capable of including a spiritual dimension. Others are less convinced and certain tensions cluster around the idealisation of the single sex environment, whether or not it entails sexual relationships, as the most fitting for spiritual development.

The rationale for the emphasis on single sex situations is generally articulated along the following lines. Initially FWBO activities were mixed. A few people experimented with single sex communities and organised single sex retreats. These were found to be "beneficial" and the idea was more extensively applied. The benefits are said to be: 1. The absence of sexual distraction caused by members of the opposite sex. 2. If men spend time with other men without the company of women they can free themselves from any infantile dependence they may have had on their mothers. For women the benefit comes in freeing them from dependence on men and the need for male attention. 3. The laying bare of sexual conditioning, particularly tendencies to over identify with one's own maleness or femaleness to the exclusion of the psychologically complementary opposites, is revealing. Single sex situations lead one to a position of being psychologically and spiritually androgynous [39].

While male/female sexual relations are characterised as "addictive" and "distracting", homosexual relationships appear less problematic, at least to the supporters of the theories given above. Marriage within the nuclear family is cast in a negative light, sometimes cautiously in order to

minimise offence to the considerable portion of married members. Asked in an interview if anything resembling the monk-laity dichotomy could arise in the FWBO, Sangharakshita replied that the danger lay "with those who are committed to, for want of a better term, the family and domestic life style." [40] In his book Buddhism For Today, Subhuti adopted a critical stance towards family life which he envisaged as being replaced by a "wider range of relationships." [41] Interestingly, Weber noted that negative attitudes towards family life are a characteristic defence against the charismatic movement being "overtaken by the conditions of every day life and the forces which dominate them." [42]

The situation of those members of the Movement with whom I had contact provides no overall picture of complete rejection of conventional marriage. Of the sixteen male Order Members that I interviewed only one was currently living in partnership with a woman. They had two young children and the woman was a Mitra hoping to become a Dharmacharini. Two women Order Members were mothers, one was living in partnership with a male Order Member the other lived alone with her children. Of the eight Mitras with whom I tape recorded interviews two were women living with their children and male partners who were Order members. Another female Mitra had a long term association with a male Order Member, and one had been married for many years to a husband who was not involved with the FWBO. Of the four remaining male Mitras two were in long term partnerships with women and two had no female partners. Of the three Friends, all male,

two were currently living with women who were not members of the Movement and one was single. Two young and single male Order Members thought that being part of the Order meant that it was less likely that they would consider marriage at the present time.

While my interviewees largely accepted that single sex activities were in some ways beneficial, it remains a practice that is the cause of some internal controversy. One Order Member writing in Shabda unleashed a forceful attack on the single sex ideology as "spiritualised middle class, Christian, English public school conditioning and the glorification of homoerotic feelings." [43] He dismissed the concept as "evil rubbish." In a later issue of the newsletter he remarked that he "felt ashamed of the existence of the single sex ideal" and dreads "those who have initially come to learn meditation discovering these things." [44]

Within the wider Buddhist movement in Britain the attack on the validity of family life has contributed to the FWBO being somewhat set apart. One British Buddhist of the Ch'an school has written that the world depicted in Subhuti's Buddhism For Today "seems to be emotionally and sexually barren, a poverty stricken account of what life is actually like." [45] Subhuti retorted that the "standard nuclear family" is the "enemy" of spiritual life [46]. It is a position that may be difficult to maintain if the FWBO is to achieve its goal as a Buddhist organisation relevant to a wide strata of society, by virtue of its rejection of monastic celibacy and the rules and customs that surround it.

Segregation is more readily maintained when underpinned by complete withdrawal from reproductive kinship relations. WBO members may choose celibacy and publicly announce the fact by declaring themselves to be Brahmacaris and wearing white robes, but they are the exception rather than the norm. Members of the Movement who want to establish sexual liaisons are left to do so in their much vaunted capacity as free individuals. The stress on individual autonomy and the insistence that lay life is a valid framework for the pursuit of Enlightenment combine to mitigate against prescribed celibacy even within the Order, and would not be a feasible option for the wider Movement.

Summary

In creating its community culture within the broader context of British society the FWBO draws together a cluster of influences. Its assertion of Buddhist teachings is avowedly westernised. At the same time it claims a fundamentalist charter in returning to what are interpreted as positions held at the time of the Buddha, that have subsequently been overwhelmed by a variety of historical accretions. The preeminence attributed to individual autonomy is composed of both Buddhist and Western influences.

Collins argues that in both Buddhism and Christianity "the social status of singleness is connected with various forms of psychological and mystical singleness" [47]. It is this singleness, "this individuality," which Collins contends to be the sociological constant that facilitates comparisons

between different kinds of "world renouncing" monastic asceticism. Individualism as found in Theravada monasticism did not permeate lay society, as was the position with Christianity, due to the absence of the notion that activities leading to the reconstruction of the mundane world could count towards salvation.

> "Thus in Buddhism there is a permanent ideological-structural obstacle to the thorough permeation of lay society to the monastic ideal." [48]

The FWBO, as a lay Buddhist organisation, in a Western society, voluntaristic and with relations governed by contract, is therefore historically linked to Christian monasticism through the "tradition of universalized social theory and aspirations based on those ideals" which it spawned.

Further refinements of the FWBO's philosophy of the True Individual, as articulated around the Bodhisattva Ideal are owned to be derived from the European Romantic tradition, particularly the work of the English poets Blake, Keats and Shelley. Stephen Prickett suggests that one of the major preoccupations of the Romantics was the issue of growth and change, [49] while Steven Lukes connects the notion of self-development with the Romantics for whom it had "the status of an ultimate value, an end-in-itself..." [50]

While it may shape the structure of a social group, a commitment to individual autonomy is no necessary impediment to corporate solidarity and effectiveness. During his investigation of managerial systems within IBM. David Mercer

observed a "cult of individualism" that resulted in "organization by controlled anarchy" based on delegation and the encouragement of individual initiative. [51] Several of the features that Mercer associates with IBM's "unique corporate culture" are paralled in the FWBO, including lifetime commitment, maximum delegation, autonomous team groups, permissible levels of dissent, personal development strongly tied to organisational development, consensus decision making, implicit rather than explicit control and horizontal communications. Mercer also writes of the institutionalisation of change within IBM, where change is ascribed positive value with the result that "any unexpected development can be handled often in a matter of weeks." [52]

Openness to, even enthusiasm for, change is noticeable in the FWBO where different ways of doing things are tried and often rejected in favour of further change. As a behavioural pattern the response to change is upheld by the Buddha's teaching on impermanence as a fact of life, so that resistance to change is regarded as a source of suffering and acceptance of change a proper Buddhist attitude.

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49. Stephen Prickett, ed., The Romantics (London:Methuen and Co., 1981).

50. Steven Lukes, Individualism (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973) p.72.

51. David Mercer, IBM:How the World's Most Successful Corporation Is Managed (London: Kogan Page,1987).

52. Ibid, p.61.

CHAPTER FIVE

SPREADING DHAMMA

The story of what took place at the time of the Buddha's Enlightenment, attained after a long period of trial and error on a single night, represents a primary model for proselytization in Buddhism. Carrithers remarks that in the Pali Canon the awakening "is made to bear the weight of the whole of the Buddha's mature teaching." [1] I would suggest that in a similar way the description of the Buddha's decision to transmit the knowledge gained at the Enlightenment, is made to bear the weight of the responsibility to spread Dhamma abroad. Having attained Enlightenment and total understanding of the Four Noble Truths concerning existence and liberation, the Buddha was reluctant to explain them to a world immersed in ignorance. But for the intervention of the deva Brahmā, Gautama may have been what the tradition describes as a pratyekabuddha, one who attains Enlightenment for himself alone. Brahmā humbly persuades the Buddha to teach his great discovery out of compassion for those who might be able to discern the truth. Carrithers notes that in this legend: "Compassion is a personal attribute of the Buddha and the sufficient motive for his decision to teach." Moreover, it is a compassion directed to a specific end, "the imparting of the Buddha's version of the renunciant life." [2] Later, as is the case with the Forest Sangha, the motive of compassion is directed at both the potential renunciant and the non-renunciant

alike; for as one monk expressed himself, following the words of the Thai teacher Buddhadasa, "the lay people are the ones out there dealing with the multitude of choices in the world. They have so many distractions. They are in the midst of the furnace."

It is clear from the events following the Buddha's Enlightenment that a missionary impetus has been present in Buddhism from the outset, exemplified in the Buddha's own decision to preach the first sermon, the long life of preaching and disputation that followed, the number of conversions and the considerable distances traversed by the Buddha in order to spread his Dhamma through the area of north-east India, known in the scriptures as the Majjhima-desa.

Compassion is a sufficient motive to teach, but in the case of the British Forest Sangha teaching can take place only under specific circumstances. Ajahn Tiradhammo, a senior monk, explains it thus:

> "In the Forest Tradition, with its emphasis upon the Vinaya, we do not consider our activities as proselytizing since we can only teach when invited to do so and under special conditions where people show proper respect " [3]

This is in observance of certain rules in the Pāṭimokkha Sutta known as the sekhiyā rules. The sekhiyā rules number seventy five in total. Rules 1-56 focus upon appearance and etiquette during alms round, while 57-72 pertain to making sure that Dhamma is taught and heard with respectful

propriety. Rules 73-75 are concerned with unsuitable ways of urinating and spitting.

According to John Holt these rules,

> "...demonstrate that discipline of one's inward state is of the utmost importance to the spiritual life of the bhikkhu. That statement might sound paradoxical in the light of the fact that most scholars have described the sekhiyās as matters of social etiquette and politeness. But, rules are much more than mere social etiquette; they are outward reflections of the inner state of a bhikkhu's mental condition." [4]

The notion of the monk as exemplar is, as we shall see, an important one , but the sekhiyā rules 57-72, to which Ajahn Tiradhammo refers, are also a comment on the "profound and insightful teachings of the Buddha" which should not be given in a context where they cannot be reflected upon adequately: "The value of Dhamma is greatly reduced if it is just received as chit-chat, or speculation for debate." [5]

Ajahn Tiradhammo regards the notion of proselytization leading to conversion as "trying to fit Buddhism into Christian models." He explains:

> "From the meditative aspect one realises that people cannot learn unless ready to do so. Thus our attitude is more that of 'sowing seeds' rather than aiming at conversion. We also try to teach people how to realise their true potential and learn to free themselves from suffering rather than emphasise Buddhism."

As is well known, the early Buddhists were only one among many of the sects of parivrājakas and wandering ascetics, philosophers and seekers of ancient India. The Buddha's system competed with other heterodox doctrines as well as with orthodox Brahmanism. Tolerance was generally

extended to other sects. The Buddha permitted a Jain householder after his conversion to Buddhism to go on making gifts to Jain monks. Such tolerance has, on the whole, been a characteristic of Buddhism throughout its history and is frequently cited by Buddhists, and some scholars, as an important reason behind the far reaching spread of Buddhism eastward across Asia. Nineteenth century Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka, when welcomed as guests in Buddhist monasteries during preaching tours of the interior sought to interpret the monks' tolerance as a sign of religious apathy and degeneration. [6]

The Forest Sangha consider themselves heirs to the traditions of tolerance, and emphatically pursue it in their discourses and ecumenical activities. Because it is regarded as one of the hopeful qualities that Buddhism can bring to a divided world, tolerance must be integrated into any missionary effort.

Due to the specification that monks can offer Dhamma only when requested, they are denied access to a range of evangelical methods. Lay people may organise talks to the public at large. People attending the talks are regarded as doing so voluntarily at the invitation of the lay people, and thus to be requesting the teaching. On special occasions, such as the Wesak and Kaṭhina ceremonies, wedding blessings or the blessing of a baby, a lay person is designated to request a discourse from the senior monk present by reciting the appropriate Pali formula.

After bowing three times with hands joined in the <u>añjali</u> gesture, the lay person recites:

> Brahmā ca lokādhipatī sahampati/ katañjalī adhivaraṃ ayācatha/ santīdha sattāpparajakkha jātikā/ desetu dhammaṃ anukampimaṃ pajaṃ.
>
> The Brahmā god Sahampati, Lord of the World,
> With palms joined in reverence requested a favour:
> Beings are here with but little dust in their eyes,
> Pray teach them the Dhamma out of compassion for them.

In this formula we see the relationship between the teaching of Dhamma and the exercise of compassion explicitly expressed, as well as the place that lay people have traditionally occupied in facilitating the transmission of the teaching by organising occasions where it can take place and initiating the request.

There is a way in which the monks are assumed to contribute to the missionary endeavour simply by the presence of the monasteries; even at a distance others can witness and admire the exemplary lives of the monks and nuns. The lives of the monaStics are thought to inspire and guide people towards wanting to know about Dhamma. During a discourse given by Ajahn Sumedho at the 1987 Kaṭhina ceremony at Harnham, he explained how the Sangha represents a society based on virtuous principles: "We all long to be part of, or near to a virtuous society." So it is that lay people have "heartfelt respect" for the Sangha. Ajahn Sumedho described the Buddhist monk as "a very powerful symbol in the mind. Once you have seen one you don't forget."

The individual monk is regarded as proclaiming his inner religious commitment through the outwardly visible signs of his shaved head and saffron robes. The Sangha as a corporate body becomes a sacred symbol towards which those attracted by holiness might be drawn. The Sangha is in a sense the lived out Dhamma. Others have also arrived at this conclusion. John Holt, for instance, maintains that "Buddhist monastic discipline is most fully understood when considered as a purposive affective expression of the Buddhist dhamma." [7]

Responses among those who happen upon a chance encounter with the monks may vary from overt friendliness, through polite acknowledgement, to jeers and even veiled threats. Uncertainty about reactions from strangers can be unsettling for the individual monk, especially if he is unaccompanied by fellow monks. But despite the intimidating nature of the experience monks deliberately place themselves in this position because "it is good for people to see monks." As an early incumbent of the Harnham vihara, Ajahn Viradhammo would sometimes walk the fourteen mile journey from Newcastle, through the city centre and suburbs, because he though it important that the inhabitants should grow used to the presence of Buddhist monks in the vicinity. The tudong walks, covering long distances, that began in 1983 deliberately place the monk in a situation where he must mingle with the public at large. Sometimes the tudong is performed in groups, sometimes it may involve only one monk and a lay companion.

Ven. Amaro described his apprehension when, during a tudong made by himself and a lay companion he approached the environs of Central Manchester:

> "Our walk through the city was something I had slightly dreaded; I had prepared myself to be kicked to pieces and never leave the place alive but after all the spreading of Dhamma, together with the mountain of good wishes and blessings we were carrying, in the end it all went very well. Contained and keeping an even pace, I determined to hold wisdom as my refuge rather than the absence of immediate threat. Our route took us through the inner city, the mass of broken and dismal streets, Old Trafford and the docklands between Salford and Central Manchester... As we walked through the town you could see that people simply react to the sight of you out of their conditioning: little children go, 'Wow,' slightly larger ones say, 'What are you?' 'Are you nuts?' 'Are you Spanish?' 'Are you an Egypt man?'
>
> 'That skin'eads wearing strange clothes.'
>
> 'It's Jesus.'
>
> 'Jesus.'
>
> Groups of teenage girls tend to laugh, giggling as you go by. 'Will you look at the state of that.'
>
> Older boys bellow insults, incomprehensible, unfamiliar, from passing cars across the street.
>
> A pair of punks said: 'Hi' and a couple of old men smiled warmly." [8]

Ven. Amaro's long account of a meandering journey from Chithurst to Harnham implies that tudong is carried out partly to provide an opportunity for lay people who live along the route to give hospitality, partly to spread the example of the holy life abroad and partly as an exercise in patience, tolerance and faith for the individual monk.

According to Ajahn Tiradhammo the public's lack of familiarity with bhikkhus can be advantageous, especially when giving Dhamma talks:

> "Sometimes, depending on the audience, being 'exotic' can be very helpful - we don't need to fit into any pre-conceived model and can then be quite challenging to people on our own terms - we merely show our humanness and especially our sense of humour. The main difficulty, I find, is with people who have read about Buddhism, but who have never meditated. They attach to certain philosophical positions such as soulessness, atheism, pessimism (dukkha) etc., and are unable to accept that these are merely subjects for meditative reflection and not beliefs." [9]

The reason for continuing the alms round is the opportunity that it provides for monks and nuns to venture outside the monastery on foot, in small groups. Because they are walking they are approachable, they may pass the time of day with whoever they meet and become a more familiar part of life in the neighbourhood of the monastery.

I have twice attended alms round with groups of nuns. The first time was a very wet morning, when, clad in wellingtons and sheltering beneath umbrellas, three nuns in single file, with myself at the rear, set out down the lane from Amaravati towards the village of Great Gaddesden. There were few other pedestrians around, but we met up with a friendly Christian nun who lives in the village, and were invited into her cottage for coffee and biscuits. Thus I learnt, the Buddhist nuns frequently receive "alms" from the Christian nun, Sister Mary, who is in turn sometimes invited to share the morning meal at Amaravati.

Another time, in dazzling sunshine, I accompanied three other nuns on a long walk to Berkhampsted, where they had a long-standing weekly invitation to visit the home of a lay supporter, who after serving beverage and biscuits drives the nuns back to the monastery in time for their meal. The first and longest section of our walk took us along rural foot paths, by the edge of fields and through woods until we emerged onto the outskirts of the town and a traffic ladened road. At a busy junction we had to negotiate a rather dangerous section where no pavement protected us from oncoming vehicles. Here we were required to await a gap in the stream of traffic as it slowed towards the turning. The cars were very close. It was easy to see inside and observe the reactions of the inhabitants, although I noticed that the nuns refrained from doing so and remained with their eyes lowered.

Some travellers turned and gawked at the nuns. Others gave sideways glances, some nudged one another and mouthed what I took to be comments, a few laughed and a small minority displayed studied disinterest.

I found it quite disconcerting to be so stared at and to be part of the cause of such noticeable curiosity. The nuns told me afterwards that they were used to the stares and that it was part of their training to deal with any feelings of awkwardness and embarrassment brought on by the experience.

Ajahn Viradhammo, who left Britain in 1984 to establish a monastery in New Zealand, has written:

> "In Thailand, I have never been mistaken for Gandhi, Krishna or a skin-head, and most people understand how a bhikkhu functions in society. Any wrong view concerning the monk and his connection with the laity, that have arisen over the ages because of superstition or corruption, can be corrected because the sincere and honest bhikkhu still has a lot of authority in the society. But outside of the traditional Buddhist cultures, the bhikkhu and his position in society is unknown, It should be remembered that the bhikkhu is not a hermit, but because of his dependence on the laity for the basic requisites of life, he is very much a part of a larger social structure." [10]

The Forest Sangha have no clearly defined organised evangelical strategy designed to incorporate them into the fold of that "larger social structure" in Britain. The intention is to pursue their own meditation practices, follow the Vinaya and respond to, rather than ostentatiously generate interest in the Dhamma. Each monastery produces literature explaining the Buddhist monastic life, but this is available mainly to people who have already taken the first step of coming to the monastery and is rarely more widely disseminated.

The Christian Convergence.

Christian monasticism provides a convenient native criterion by which the stranger might attempt to understand and ascribe meaning to the Buddhist monks. Some bhikkhus feel that this tends toward misleading comparisons and confusion between two quite different religious forms. Scholars see the difference in the fact that monasteries have at no time been as integral to the practice of Christianity

as they are to the practice of Buddhism. "For Buddhists, monasticism is not a heightened form of the religious life, as it is for Catholic Christians, it is the religious life" [11] The FWBO would hotly contend this view, and even for the Forest Sangha it is flawed because they do encourage lay people to live "a religious life" within the world. The differences which the bhikkhus wish to stress between their Order and Christian Orders reside in matters of form rather than function. Ajahn Tiradhammo again:

> "The closest Christian monasticism has come to the Buddhist principle is the form of the Friar, which didn't last very long and is virtually non-existent today. Most people naturally assume that we are self-sufficient due to the Christian model and find it hard to comprehend that we are completely dependent upon donations. Many people are hesitant to come to the monastery thinking that we are under vows of silence or are 'cloistered' from the world rather than being like the respected "community centre" Buddhist monastery in the East." [12]

The British Forest Sangha would prefer to abjure the term monk altogether, but acknowledge that the matter was decided by the early translators of Buddhist texts. They accept that the rendering of the Pali term "bhikkhu" as monk is now common currency, too well established to alter, despite the fact that the Pali "bhikkhu" and the Sanskrit "bhikṣu" are both included in the Oxford English Dictionary.

In an introduction to The Book of Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka Vol.1) I.B. Horner provides a lengthy explanation for her choice of the term "monk" as a translation of the Pali "bhikkhu". [13] Although, she admits to the many difficulties this presents. For a detailed discussion the

reader should consult Horner, but in the light of the present deliberations it is worth considering some of these difficulties and Horner's reasons for overriding them.

Horner identifies four continuing and significant historical differences between Christian and Buddhist monasticism.

1. Unlike Christian monasteries no power of authority was vested in an individual within a Buddhist monastery, such as an Abbot, but in the pāṭimokkha course of training and in the Sangha.

2. Although bound to individual poverty, Christian monks were bidden by the Benedictine Rule to work. They were encouraged to till the soil and a class of lay brothers eventually emerged who specialised in manual toil. The profits from the monks' labours went to the order and this accumulated together with lay donations of land and property to produce considerable collective prosperity. The pāṭimokkha precepts do not allow the bhikkhus to work the soil, although the erection and repair of buildings is permitted.

3. The bhikkhu is entirely dependent on the laity for food, lodging and medicine. Horner points out that "in the great centuries of Western monachism monks, far from being beggars for alms, were the donors of abundant charity." [14] Buddhist laity do not regard the bhikkhus as " a means of transmitting their gifts of charity to other needy laity." [15] In spite of all this Horner decides to uphold the translation of "bhikkhu" as "monk" because the "affinities

between them seem to be marked enough." [16] She does not provide an examination of what she considers these affinities to be, merely that the two terms represent "historical variations of a common tendency." [17] Moreover, "an easy feminine form" is available in the word nun as a convenient translation for "bhikkhunī." [18]

The Western bhikkhus wish to stress particular divergences between between Buddhist and Christian monasticism. Ajahn Tiradhammo is currently writing a book on the Buddhist monastic lifestyle, aimed at clarifying these points of difference. "We are not," he says, "bound by vows. We are not in obedience to a person in authority. We are not enclosed in cloisters and we are mendicant. We have to accept that people refer to us as monks and set about redefining the term." [19]

The Forest Sangha seeks to found a distinct understanding of Buddhist monasticism, partly for the sake of truth and clarity, and partly because such an understanding may render the Sangha more approachable to a wider number of people. It follows that monks should be concerned about how the symbolic content of Sangha life, according to Vinaya, is perceived in the wider community, beyond the immediate groupings of lay supporters. How are the monks regarded among those whose contact with and knowledge of Buddhism is limited or non existent?

Experiences outside the monasteries can bring the monks and nuns face to face with a culture gap that produces reactions of complete incomprehension among some members of

the public. I have already touched upon the alms round as a means by which the Sangha can present itself to the public and described the fortuitous meeting with the jogger who eventually offered the monks charge of Hammer Wood at Chithurst, but there is also evidence that from a distance the alms round can be misunderstood. A woman in Berkhamsted, the prosperous town close to Amaravati, described the monastics disparagingly as "people who go begging." We had fallen into conversation after I enquired for directions. She was not in any way hostile when she knew that I was heading for the monastery, but keen to register her disapproval of "begging."

The daily alms round is part of the rhythm of life in Thai society. Monks leave the monasteries each morning and often follow well known routes along which lay supporters are ready to place offerings of curries and rice into the monks' bowls. The monks then return to their monasteries to eat the one meal of the day. Obviously, this pattern of behaviour depends on certain mutual understanding, shared cultural values and norms - none of which exist in Britain. Nuns and monks in Britain do not expect that food of any kind, let alone cooked food, will be put into their bowls as they walk by on alms round. The public could hardly be expected to respond in this way when most people do not even know the purpose of the monastics passing by. There are a few stories of workmen offering their sandwiches once the intention of alms round has been explained, but such stories are few and far between. In Jesmond, a leafy middle

class area of Newcastle where monks go on alms round, they make pre-arranged visits to the homes of lay supporters and friends.

As the network of lay groups spreads and the four monasteries expand, these issues of how the Sangha is "read" by its growing number of contacts becomes a matter with which the Sangha as "bearers of Dhamma" must be concerned.

That it appears desirable for the Sangha to be understood in purely Buddhist terms, rather than in association with mismatched Christian references is not a reflection of religious intolerance. On the contrary, as previously noted, tolerance is highly valued in theory and actuality too. For example during the time of my research bhikkhus from Harnham made several visits to Christian monasteries. Rather it is due to the fact that the religious life, led in accordance with the Vinaya, is in itself a vital means for presenting Dhamma to the world in continuation of the Buddha's own compassionate example.

The Vinaya embodies in the form of a text a species of social action that contains and transmits meaning beyond material composition. To begin with the Vinaya is <u>buddha-vacana</u>, the word of the Buddha. In the Sutta Vibaṅgha section of the Vinaya Piṭaka a story concerning the behaviour of a certain monk or a group of monks usually precedes the formation of a rule by the Buddha. These rules are moreover conducive to Enlightenment and in full accord with the soteriological concerns of The Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths diagnose the human condition and prescribe a

means of liberation from its constraints; the Vinaya is the detailed working out of that prescription. Any heinous offence precludes the bhikkhu from the possibility of Enlightenment. Even if he does not confess the offence, and it remains undetected, he is considered to be defeated (pārājika), despite his future efforts, and no longer an authentic bhikkhu. As Holt has it, the Vinaya is a "serious reckoning," with the central concern of what it means to be a Buddhist [20]. The actions of the monks in their daily lives express spiritual values, theories of selfhood and ethical principles. They constitute Dhamma.

The Thai Connection

In addition to being critically aware of the manner of their insertion into British society the Western monks are also self-evidently conscious of their relationship to the Thai lineage from which they spring. Photographs of Ven. Ajahn Chah, original teacher to many of the senior monks, adorn the monasteries. The library at Amaravati is a veritable gallery of photographs of numerous venerable Asian monks. The monks speak frequently and publicly of their "gratitude" to Ajahn Chah and to the religious tradition of Thailand for past generosity. The connection with Thai Buddhism is one of a line of inter-connections that relate the Western Sangha to the Sangha of the Four Directions (Pali - cātuddisa-saṅgha), that is all bhikkhus of the past, present and future. The connection with the wider Theravada Sangha validates the Western monks as authentic, orthodox

members of a collective transgressing all boundaries of time and place. Psychologically it provides a powerful affirmation of collective identity and solidarity. The individual monk can locate himself as one small but essential part of an institution reaching back 2,500 years, formed in the present so as to cross cultural boundaries, and reaching similarly into the future.

The idea of cātuddisa-saṅgha, dependent as it is on each bounded unit within it (Pali - sammukhībhūta-saṅgha) observing Vinaya, is a source of legitimation for the Western Sangha and also constrains the monks in any alterations they may want to make to traditional practices. When it became necessary to adapt traditional robes and requisites to cope with a northern climate, a document describing the adaptations, complete with photographs, was sent to the Council of Elders in Thailand (Mahātherasamakom) for approval. There is no legal requirement that this consultation should take place, but the Western monks were anxious to allay anxieties that they might be making innovations that went beyond the "spirit" if not the "letter" of the Vinaya.

Ajahn Tiradhammo explained the position to me:

> "The Mahātherasamakom has a committee that regulates and oversees Dhammadhuta work (lit. messengers of the Dhamma) and all Thai monks taking up posts in recognised Thai temples in foreign countries must pass this committee. Their main control is through the Department of Religious Affairs which controls issuing of passports. Since the (non-Thai) monks have their own passports they are not directly subject to these authorities. However, in order to maintain the link with Ajahn Chah and

> his disciples in Thailand, as well as the many supporters and friends, we try to keep close links with the senior monks of the Sangha administration, primarily through selective personal contact, i.e. inviting them to England (and Australia and New Zealand) and sending word or seeing that they are visited by friends going to Thailand. We also consult them on certain points of Vinaya, i.e. regarding the ten precepts for women, changing the date of the rains residence, Sangha property etc. I also understand that the Thai Dhammadhuta monks are directly responsible to the government authorities as they are technically a branch of the Royal Thai Embassy." [21]

There is a strong relationship between the Western monks and the Thai radical reforming movement that has grown up around Bhikkhu Buddhadasa and his followers, particularly Bhikkhu Paññanando, a popular Thai monk who has visited the British monasteries several times. He was described to me by one of the Western bhikkhus as providing a bridge between the Western and Thai tradition.

<u>The Sangha and New Religious Movements</u>

There is a sense in which this locating of itself within the total Theravada Order provides the Western Sangha with useful credentials in the new cultural context. These credentials, it is felt, help to separate emergent Theravada Buddhism from the several other new religious groups operating in contemporary Britain. New religious movements in Britain began to come into prominence in the nineteen sixties and seventies. Many have been at the centre of controversy. Beckford identifies those who have numbered among the controversial as The Unification Church, the Children of God, Scientology, The Divine Light Mission, The

International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Transcendental Meditation and the Rajneesh Foundation [22]

Several of these movements are oriental in origin and the monks do not want to be identified too closely with them in the public mind. A scrap book of cuttings from local newspapers documents how the monks came close to being refused local council permission to establish the Chithurst monastery as such in 1980-81. Local resistance was based on current unfavourable reactions to new religious movements. A film of a meeting which the monks organised to introduce themselves to villagers at Chithurst village hall illustrates how most objectors had designated the Sangha as a troublesome "cult." One man continued to confuse the monks with members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness who he had seen regularly wearing robes and chanting their devotional hymns in the middle of Oxford Street. Despite the explanations he had just heard from the monks sitting on the platform alongside a respected Church of England clergyman, the man seemed unable to rid himself of anxieties that they would likewise be wildly chanting and dancing along the village street.

Beckford notes that "the number of mass media reports favourable to N.R.M.s in Britain has been extremely small." [23] However, he regards the narrowness of the journalistic approach as a reflection of general public attitudes [24]. He concludes through his "experience of talking to people in all walks of life for a decade or more," that the British are

"...intensley suspicious of any and all would be Messiahs, evangelists and gurus. They are accustomed to relegating spiritual enthusiasm to a category of, at best, eccentricity, and at worst, exploitation. This disposition is reinforced by the mass media's readiness to consider religious or spiritual innovations solely in terms of its actually or potentially corrupting aspects, for this is what makes for newsworthiness." [25]

The monks were not without supporters in Sussex and by judiciously providing access to local newspaper reporters and feature writers reaped a fair press. In dealing with the journalists the monks laid great stress on the moral precepts espoused by Buddhism, the link with the venerable and respected Thai tradition and the prohibition against canvassing for converts. A television programme about the monastery broadcast by the BBC religious series "Everyman" contributed to its acceptance.

The fact that the Sangha found eventual acceptance and even friends among the inhabitants of Hampshire and Sussex was largely due to its being amenable to investigation, and also in no small measure to the personal charm and astuteness of Ajahn Sumedho, whose response to the local furore was a skilful exercise in public relations. It involved detaching the image of the monks from the notoriety achieved by the "cults." Employing persistence and patience the monks succeeded in presenting themselves as mainstream representatives of an established world religion, as opposed to the idea of a newly invented, faddish, unstable and exotic cult so feared by a large section of the British public.

We have seen how the limitations on methods of evangelism imposed by the Vinaya are overcome, firstly by

regarding the Sangha as exemplary and so charismatic, and secondly, by the enthusiasm of lay supporters. The latter's involvement compares with the situation that arose in the early period of Buddhist penetration of China, where the laity performed an important role in propagating the religion. [26]

The low key style of proselytization is both in keeping with Theravada tradition, and a useful means of distancing the Sangha from current preconceived ideas about the new religious movements and public unease about their recruitment techniques. For as Beckford observes:

> "The most persistent and salient issue in the cult controversy in many countries concerns recruitment. Anti-cultists charge N.R.M.s with using immoral and/or illegal means of persuading people to become members. Terms like 'brainwashing,' 'deception,' 'coercive persuasion,' and 'mind control' abound in the rhetoric and some psychiatrists and psychologists have attempted to lend them scientific status." [27]

Thus far the strength of anti-cult feeling charted by Beckford has been countered more or less successfully by the British Forest Sangha by their appeal to what Weber called the "sanctity of immemorial tradition." [28] It seems that this appeal can find a response even if the tradition concerned is not the established belief within society, but one that through scholarly works and popular literature has attained a degree of merit in the public eye.

Buddhism in the High Street

In general the FWBO also accepts the low-key and exemplary model of prosetylization as most authentically Buddhist. Dharmachari Ratnaprabha discussing the issue in front of an audience of academics pronounced:

> "A Buddhist genuinely wishing to spread Dharma learns that he or she has no alternative but to appeal to the independent judgement and natural aspirations for growth of the people he or she meets. In sum, Buddhism is said to be a missionary religion not because Buddhists seek to control large numbers of people, but because Buddhist teachings have always emphasised concern for the welfare of others, which welfare Buddhism itself claims to be designed to promote." [29]

In an interview another Order Member told me:

> "It wouldn't be Buddhism if it was trying to convert. I am quite emphatic about this. There shouldn't be any sort of pressure because that sort of pressure comes from a very erroneous viewpoint. You are trying to convert someone because you feel insecure and would be happier if there were more people around thinking that same as you. Buddhism is just not like that. You can share it just as you can if you listen to a beautiful piece of music...You just share something that is worthwhile."

It would certainly not be accurate to portray the FWBO as fiercely evangelical, in that there is no house to house campaigning as with the Jehovah's Witnesses, or distribution of literature in the street, as with The International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Nevertheless, the promotion of Buddhism is a major preoccupation within the FWBO, and the focus of much activity. Also, because Order Members are not faced with an injunction that they might expound Buddhism only when invited to do so, the style of promotional activity tends to be far more obtrusive than the

extreme quietism of the Theravada monastics. For example, beginners' retreats have been advertised in the classified columns of The Guardian newspaper as well as in The Middle Way. Posters and leaflets for classes at FWBO centres are eye-catching and sometimes quirky. The Glasgow centre once employed images of Humphrey Bogart and Marlene Dietrich on posters designed to attract interest in meditation classes. For years many Londoners found their way to classes at the Bethnal Green centre due to advertisements in the listings magazine Time Out.

The urban location of the FWBO centres makes them accessible and apparent to large numbers of people, unlike the Theravada monasteries which are situated outside towns and cities. The FWBO retreat centres offer a chance for those same urbanites to escape to the country. The beauty and seclusion of the surroundings of the rural retreat centres feature as an attraction in their publicity materials.

The setting up of a new urban FWBO centre is a conscious move towards expansion, as one of the main functions of an urban centre is to establish regular meditation classes for beginners, some of whom it is expected will go on to attend a beginner's class on Buddhism, take part in Pujas, go on retreats, and deepen their involvement perhaps to the point of becoming Mitras and then Order Members. When Devamitra initiated moves to set up a centre in Norwich in 1976 he considered it a suitable location because:

> "It has a population of at least 80,000 - a town with a smaller population might not easily support a Buddhist centre - and also because it is something of a cultural centre for East Anglia. There is a university and quite often students take a lively interest in the FWBO. Also there were other Order Members living in Norfolk and I knew I could call on their resources to some extent."

Devamitra's next move was to find a base from which to work. Contacts made via a local Buddhist group, now defunct, led him to lodge with a university lecturer with an interest in Buddhism, two of whose students subsequently became Order Members. Devamitra then set about searching for premises.

> "I had no money of course, but I came to find out that there were some short life premises held by the council that they were willing to let out for two pounds a week - two up two down terraced houses."

Norwich City Council offered the FWBO a two year lease, renewable annually, on two terraced houses in Queen's Road and planning permission for change of use from a place of residence to a place of religious worship. Twelve years later, at the time of my interview with Devamitra, FWBO Norwich retained the lease. Devamitra had £450 savings to place at the disposal of the centre. He organised Yoga classes at a local school hall as well as fund raising activities, which together added another £450 towards the cost of alterations to the new premises. No classes were set up until the centre officially opened, although two meditation retreats were held at a Suffolk farmhouse rented by an Order Member.

> "We managed to encourage some of the people who had been going to the Yoga classes, and other contacts that I had made, to come on those retreats."

When the centre opened the retreatants formed its core membership.

> "Quite a lot of people quite quickly became Mitras and even Order Members. That was during the first year to eighteen months. Then there was a lull and then it picked up again."

The following year, 1977, the centre moved to more spacious premises, again leased from the city council, at All Saints Green, in the heart of the city centre. The Queens Road premises eventually became a Yoga studio. The same year a men's' community was established in an adjacent property at All Saints Green. A wholefood restaurant associated with the centre provided a small income, mainly through its outside catering team and various fund raising events, such as a benefit dinner and a musical recital, were held. Even so funds were inadequate.

> "I felt increasingly embarrassed because, although I wasn't working full time for money, I was in a sense working and also on the dole. This was true for other Order Members and the only way that we could see out of this dilemma was to start charging for classes. It didn't make any difference to the numbers that came along. It did make it possible for me to be supported."

Other centres eventually followed the example of Norwich in this matter. At the time of the field-work charges for a class averaged between £2 to £4 a session for those earning a wage, with reduced prices for the unemployed, students etc., and the waiving of charges "for those genuinely unable to pay."

Devamitra moved on from Norwich after four years, since when there have been three subsequent chairmen. At the time

of my visit in 1988 it was a flourishing and active centre occupying a niche within the broader spectrum of city life. The centre is known and accepted in and around the city. Attendance averages around 120 attendees per week, although that figure includes people making more than one visit. Yoga and T'ai Chi classes continue at Queens Road with meditation and Pujas taking place in the upstairs shrine room at All Saints Green. The lower floor being used as a reception room and housing the lending library of tapes and books. The writings of Sangharakshita and other books on Buddhism are on sale, as are copies of Mitrata and The Golden Drum.

Like all FWBO centres the Norwich one holds several festivals each year. The founding of the FWBO and the Buddha's birth and his Enlightenment are celebrated during April and May. Dharma Day, which is held to mark the preaching by the Buddha of his first sermon, occurs in June or July and in August there is a festival dedicated to Padmasambhava, the Indian teacher credited with introducing Buddhism to Tibet. He is the central figure of the Nyingma sect , to which most of Sangharakshita's Tibetan teachers belonged. Sangha Day, an adaptation of the Theravada Kaṭhina ceremony when lay people offer cloth and other requisites to the monks, is held in October.

The precise form of any celebration may vary, but generally includes a talk, Puja and some meditation. In 1988 Dharma Day in Norwich was given public expression. A large, centrally located hall was hired and colourfully decorated. A puppet theatre and story teller were engaged and

refreshments served. The Buddhist content came with the short Puja and a talk. Advertised as an FWBO Open Day in the local press and on radio and via posters distributed through the city, the event was attended by FWBO members from other parts of East Anglia, as well as a considerable number of people who had previously had no contact with the Movement.

Other means by which FWBO Norwich seeks to integrate into the cultural life of the city include giving talks to local schools and organisations and by joining different religious groups, peace groups and Third World charities in organising the annual Norwich Festival of Non-Violence.

Within the FWBO art is considered to be an important means for contacting a diffuse constituency of people who may become interested in Buddhism. Musical and poetry events have been held at the Norwich centre and for several years FWBO Croydon supported an Arts Centre. Though the Arts Centre was eventually closed because it threatened to distract energy away from the FWBO centre proper (and its highly successful associated vegetarian restaurant Hockneys). Although it was ultimately a bone of contention, the Art Centre was initially much acclaimed in the pages of Golden Drum and the fact that it was allowed to expand so rapidly demonstrates the significance which the FWBO is prepared to attach to artistic pursuits.

Artists, designers, musicians and writers are well represented within the ranks of the FWBO. Sangharakshita has published his poetry and is author of an essay entitled The Religion of Art, where he declares religion and art to be "in

essence" one because both can lead to the expansion of consciousness and heightened awareness [30].

It is the "transformational" potential of the creative process that is linked to the Buddha's Dharma:

> "Openness to the Dharma and to great art can lead to the smashing through of our persistence in prolonging modes of being we're in fact sick of." [31]

Art, Sangharakshita postulates, liberates the individual from the shackles of mundane conformity alerting a person to the possibility of inner change through his/her transcendental qualities. The creative mind that is "free" and "open" is opposed to the reactive mind which is "conditioned" and less free.

> "The reactive mind is unaware, predictable and superficial. Turning to the creative mind we shall see that it is aware, original and acts from its depths." [32]

Because it is conditioned the reactive mind is characteristic of those individuals who are embedded in a "group," according to the concepts of the individual and the group current in the FWBO and explained in the previous chapter, so that: "Creativity is to the spiritual community" as "reactivity is to the group." [33]

As well as facilitating self-transformation, art is an important tool in maintaining the spiritual community which must be recruited from those who are, as yet, still caught up in "the group" and in "reactivity."

> "A hereditary spiritual community is a contradiction in terms, and so if the spiritual community is to survive, it must recruit its new members from the group." [34]

Art is viewed as a channel for penetrating sections of the wider culture in such a way that greater numbers of people are invited to make contact with the Dharma. In an article FWBO Order Member and professional theatre director, Jayamanti, delineates his vision of a Buddhist theatre company that could "provide the spark that would detonate the power, insight and beauty of great writers." [35]. In this way Buddhism, as conceived by the FWBO, might begin to penetrate mainstream culture.

> "We can afford to take our embryonic artistic pursuits very seriously for they are the forerunners of a cultural revolution in the West." [36]

To date the principal author published on the list of Windhorse Publishing, the publishing wing of the FWBO, has been Sangharakshita. His works include travel letters, poetry and an essay entitled The Glory of the Literary World. Thus far no other Buddhist literary figure has emerged to be added to the list, which is clearly aimed at a provenance beyond the FWBO. Sangharakshita is becoming a focus of attention outside the Movement and his most scholarly works on Buddhism have been available for several years. In 1988/89 two television programmes took Sangharakshita as their subject and more recently he was featured reading from the Pali Canon on BBC Radio Four's programme Prayer For Today.

Gestalt, Yoga and the Martial Arts

There are, furthermore, two other alternative directions through which the FWBO attempt the dual project of integrating with the non-Buddhist elements of British culture and simultaneously opening up to an expanded range of contacts. The first entails, as has already been noted, a link with the techniques and practices of Eastern origin, particularly Yoga and the martial arts. These practices have been popularised across diverse stratum of British society. I have no hard statistical evidence to draw on, but common observation suggests that in most parts of the country even quite small towns support classes and clubs dedicated to a variety of branches of Yoga and the martial arts, and that in highly populated areas there is a good deal of choice available.

An open day at Bristol Buddhist Centre in May 1988 was advertised as:

> "A good opportunity to visit the centre; see what we have to offer, browse in our bookstall, or simply chat with Buddhists...no charge. Drop in whenever you like." [37]

As well as an introduction to meditation and a discussion on Buddhism, time was set aside for Yoga, and loose clothing the recommended garb. In this way the FWBO can employ its own Yoga teachers and address potential recruits, in this case those acquainted with Yoga.

Sthirananda, an Order Member and T'ai Chi teacher believes the connection between Buddhist practice and the martial arts to be the shared element of self-cultivation.

> "You could argue that a Buddhist shouldn't be involved with the martial arts. My answer is

> that one can view the martial arts as an aspect of one's development, because it is a discipline. It doesn't mean to say you have got to go and hit people. You can even use the martial arts to encourage non-violence. You have to look at the two sides of self-defence. If you look at Karate comics and the Kung-Fu comics you do get a distinct flavour that people are into personal power trips of some kind. But if you look at it much more in terms of development - even certain aspects of Karate - you can see that they are absolutely against hurting people and the whole purpose of the arts is to cultivate yourself."

The mutually understood language of self-cultivation through discipline and techniques of self-control means that the FWBO can more readily engage in a dialogue with certain practitioners of the martial arts so that for instance, a group of members from a Karate club in Farnborough can comfortably attend a weekend retreat centred on Karate at Padmaloka and thus be exposed to Buddhism. [38] It is probably safe to deduce that in Britain any growth of interest in either the martial arts or Yoga produces an enlarged constituency for FWBO recruitment.

Another scattered constituency of interest and likely source of recruits consists of those who are attracted by the FWBO's use of language and concepts borrowed from the Human Potential Movement which, as Wallis reminds us,

> "...flowered in the mid-1960s with the spread of encounter groups, Gestalt Therapy, Primal Therapy, Bioenergetics, and a hundred and one permutations and elaborations upon these themes as well as the invention and application of dozens of other ideas and practices." [39]

There is a fairly convincing sociological explanation to account for the Human Potential Movement in particular, and much else in general, articulated by Peter Berger. Berger

points to the fact that modernization "has brought with it a strong accentuation of the subjective side of human existence." [40] The epistemological question - "What can I know?" - becomes an imperative one, not only for philosophers, but for the ordinary man in the street. It is Berger's hypothesis that traditional, premodern, society is characterised by powerful forces of social support in the form of institutions and behavioural norms that bolster an individual's "whole range of moral beliefs." [41] The patterns they form Berger calls plausibility structures. In a traditional society plausibility structures are "highly reliable." Under the conditions of modern pluralism they become fragmented, resulting in societies "characterised by unstable, incohesive, unreliable plausibility structures." [42] Competition exists between world views creating a social situation whereby the individual is forced to choose between them. Equally, in my view, a person may choose not to choose. It is often heard as a proud boast that this or that person does not consider themselves an adherent of any religion "-ism" or party line. Indeed, Dumont has argued that the dominant, over-arching world view emanating from modernisation is in fact individualism, [43] which may be construed as an ideological refraction expressing and compounding the actual social situation described by Berger.

Berger outlines the ambivalent nature of plausibility structures in the modern world and sets them against the more or less taken-for-granted epistemological templates of pre-modern eras. He maintains that modern Western culture has

been "marked by an ever-increasing attention to subjectivity." [44] It is apparent in a variety of aspects.

> "Philosophy is only one small part of this. There is modern literature (the novel is the prime example here), modern art, and last but not least, the astronomic proliferation of modern psychologies and psychotherapies. All these however are manifestations of sujectivization on the level of theoretical thought. All of them are rooted in pretheoretical experience - fundamentally in the experience that the socially defined universe can no longer be relied upon. Indeed, speaking of modern philosophy, one can put this by saying that the aforementioned social situation is its necessary plausibility structure. The same can be said of modern literature, art and psychology (and not so incidentally modern sociology)." [45]

Kilbourne and Richardson agree that we are living in a "psychological society" and that one of the outcomes is "the assumption by the professional psychologists of what was previously religion's social control function." [46] They go on to argue that there is a functional equivalence between the role of psychotherapy and that of the new religious movements, "to the extent that they provide the individual with a positive new identity and with a new sense of life's meaning." [47] They are both to be considered "change agents" and as competing for clients in the market place.

Psychotherapeutic theories and techniques and religious aspirations actually combine within the FWBO, the psychological aspect being most prominent during a person's early stage of contact with the Movement. Religious goals come into focus as the person progresses from regular Friend to Mitra. In the FWBO the language of the Human Potential Movement is employed to talk about meditation, especially

when addressing beginners. An example is the following item advertising beginner's meditation course from a leaflet published by the Bristol Buddhist Centre.

> "Practising meditation has an effect on our whole life, helping us to recognise negative thoughts and feelings and transform them into positive emotions. Through meditation we learn to experience states of mind which are calmer, clearer and more elevated than our present ones. In our classes and courses two meditations are taught, one to develop clarity and awareness: the other friendliness, confidence and love." [48]

Subhuti discusses the fact that in the FWBO's formative period "many saw Buddhism and meditation as another kind of therapy and brought to them their belief in techniques as an almost magical means of changing themselves. Buddhism had to be distinguished from therapy." [49]

Even thought this distinction is usually made, the therapeutic angle continues to be employed and provided with a Buddhist interpretation. In the majority of the interviews that I conducted the same theme surfaced. Here is an example from my interview with Devamitra:

> "The key thing is that human beings can change and that they can change for the better and they have tremendous potential if they would only make the necessary efforts to develop. I certainly feel that happened in my own life. I have seen it happen to some of my fellow Order Members. So what I can do any human being can do. The Buddha did it- anybody else can. All you have to be is a sentient being and apply effort and get rid of negative emotions and develop positive emotions, develop greater awareness and so on."

Exercises borrowed from the encounter group mode of interaction form part of the basic igredients at retreats

designed for those new to the Movement. An Order Member told me of his experience.

> "I was communicating with people more straight-forwardly and more honestly. It was a friendly retreat. Just doing things like communication exercises. Basically there are three exercises. The first is called Just Looking. You just sit down with one person and just look at each other, which is very difficult. Generally it is somebody you don't know. You just look at each other for a couple of minutes, then talk for a couple of minutes. then you do the second exercise which is a phrase repeated over and over again. There are five traditional phrases that are used, such as - the cow is in the field. So you exhaust the conceptual content pretty quickly. It isn't that which you are worried about, but the ability to engage with somebody and what is communicated below the conceptual level. You do that each of you. The third exercise you both choose a sentence and one says, - water is white. The other says - the sky is blue today.
> "These exercises are very strong. We do them for four days running. They help you see through all the crap that people throw up in their communication. Straight-forward communication is the basis on which one can build spiritual friendship."

One interviewee, a Mitra, who had previously been under medication for depression described his first meditation retreats and his response to the communication exercises:

> "The first exercise I done...well, at the end of it I was nearly crying. Because I had really put myself there. I can't explain it. I didn't actually cry. I hadn't cried for years, but I had a very powerful emotional experience. I have done these exercises since with mixed reactions, but nothing like that. I was elated, because I was feeling something and those feelings had near enough come out of me instead of being locked away. When I was depressed I was dead emotionally and this was a bit of an awakening."

Part of the reason for the initial stress on the resolution of psychological distress comes from an apprehension that in Western society suffering or dukkha, is

more likely to have a psychological as opposed to material cause. Consequently the beginner is taught the concept of "negative mental states" which cause distress and presented with the possibility of achieving "positive mental states" which relieve distress and cultivate happiness. To begin with in the FWBO meditation is introduced as a technique for sustaining "positive mental states." It is not until the later stage, when the new recruit has passed on to taking classes in Buddhism, that ideas derived from the Pali and Sanskrit scriptures are introduced.

My interviewees regarded the psychotherapeutic approach as an important first step to be absorbed and subsumed by later stages, when attention is fixed on the transcendental, trans-personal aspect of Buddhist teaching.

> "If you suffer from terrible headaches and you meditate and it works then that doesn't mean it's not valid. That's perfectly OKAY. it's just if you want more there is more."

Exactly what that "more" is will be the subject of the next chapter. Here I have tried to show how the two Buddhist movements present themselves to the world at large, which is the location of possible recruits. I have concentrated on these facets because they tell us about the inner workings of the two movements. Also they give some indication of the inclinations of people most likely to join or associate. On this last point it seems more useful to examine the movement's own profile than to try to uncover a social or psychological profile for "types" of recruits. As Eileen Barker concludes with reference to conversion to new

religious movements it is too often assumed "ex posto facto that because someone has joined he/she must have a need of some kind. Without the backing of empirical evidence which includes the careful use of control groups such theories lead to little more than empty polemic." [50]

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CHAPTER SIX

MEDITATIONS

Buddhist religiosity in Britain is expressed through and characterised by a unanimous regard for the practice of meditation. All but a few of my Buddhist informants practised meditation on a fairly regular basis, and the attraction of being taught how to meditate is frequently a primary reason for prompting people to attend a FWBO centre, or to visit a Theravada monastery for the first time. Buddhist teaching tends to be approached and absorbed through learning to meditate.

For the first half of the present century in Britain the situation was quite the reverse. In the early days of the Buddhist Society the focus was on the study of Buddhist doctrine, and a Meditation Circle was not formed until 1930. In line with Berger's comment that modern Western culture has been "marked by an ever-increasing attention to subjectivity," [1] the numbers of people interested in meditation grew and clustered around William Purfhurst to form the English Sangha Trust in 1956. Nowadays it might be said that meditation is a way of behaving that actually defines Buddhists in Britain. For the individual meditator the setting aside of a regular period of time for meditation partly sustains his or her identity as a Buddhist, while for the outsider meditation is considered to be what Buddhists essentially do. Rather as Christians and Muslims are known to pray, Buddhists are known to meditate, although there is probably little general understanding of what that difference

implies. As a popular concept the equation of Buddhism with meditation is an accurate one for Britain, but does not so readily apply to the South and South East Asian contexts where most of the lay people do not meditate..

In the Theravada countries until comparatively recently, and with the exception of certain pious elderly lay people, meditation was confined to the bhikkhu-sangha. Even there meditation defined only a few, the forest monks. It was a situation that began to change after the forces of modernisation described in Chapter One brought about a narrowing of the distance between lay people and monks. Among sections of the expanding middle classes there arose a belief that one could work for salvation "here and now" even while pursuing an ordinary family life. According to the new thinking one need not renounce the world to fully practice the Buddha's teachings, nor need one face hundreds of births before becoming fit to approach close to nibbana, as was traditionally believed of the layman. Writing about the situation in Sri Lanka during the 1960s Ames reported the increased incidence of meditation practice among lay people, the inclusion of meditation rooms in private houses and the growth of public meditation centres [2].

The trend has continued to become widespread, although the numbers of lay people who do not meditate still predominate. It marks what Gombrich describes as "the biggest change which Buddhism has undergone in the twentieth century: the belief that every Buddhist should seek his own

salvation in this life, which in turn means that he should practice meditation." [3]

In Sri Lanka many meditation centres are founded at pre-existent monasteries. The meditation teachers are not always incumbents of those monasteries or even residents there by right of pupillary succession, but specialists who have been invited to teach either on a temporary or permanent basis [4] The centres are referred to in Sinhala by the term bhāvanā madhyasthāna, a Sanskrit loanword and literal translation of the English "meditation centre." In Gombrich's view this is a significant linguistic detail that "mirrors a cultural trend." The meditation centre is an import due largely, but by no means entirely, to Western influence [5].

Gombrich notes the claims that Sri Lankan lay people make as to the calming effect of meditation, and the benefits it brings for mental health and personal effectiveness, with the following comment:

> "The aim of Buddhist meditation is insight into the inadequacy, impermanence and ultimate unworthiness of everything in life as we normally know it, including human ties and affections. Buddhism attacks the common sense world view of *l'homme moyen sensuel*, and begins this attack by dissecting and spurning the pleasures of the senses. The Buddhist approaching Enlightenment can thus hardly tolerate family life and least of all maintain a marital relationship. This is why traditional Buddhism has looked askance at lay meditation. It has foreseen the danger of emotional conflict for one who tries to oscilate between sequestered meditation and the concerns of ordinary daily life, and of intellectual confusion (if nothing worse) for one who tries to work on his mind alone, without constant supervision
>
> "In traditional Buddhism, bhāvanā is regarded as an end in itself. To make progress in

> bhāvanā is to come closer to attaining nirvana; the meditation cannot even be called a means to the good of salvation, in that it is itself a very part of the goal (in however small a degree) and in no way adventitious. A fortiori, it is certainly not to be regarded as an instrument for any form of worldly welfare or success." [6]

In addition to the sources of Western influence already mentioned, the growth of meditation centres in Sri Lanka has been further affected by numbers of visiting Westerners attending the centres, and by the presence of Western monks, some of whom incline towards the instrumental view of meditation. [7] The major non-Western influence has come from Burma where lay meditation "had already become fashionable early in the 20th century." [8]

The traditional Theravada system recognises two distinct, but related, forms of meditation. One specific set of meditations pursues the development of mental concentration and tranquillity and is known as samatha or samādhi. These meditation techniques, as prescribed in the texts, lead to higher mystical states on various levels known in Pali as jhāna (Skrt - dhyāna). Walpola Rahula explains the samatha meditations thus:

> "All these mystic states, according to the Buddha are mind-created, mind-produced, conditioned (saṃkhata). They have nothing to do with Reality, Truth, Nirvāna. This form of meditation existed before the Buddha. Hence it is not purely Buddhist, but it is not excluded from the field of Buddhist meditation. However, it is not essential for the realization of Nirvāna. The Buddha himself, before his Enlightenment, studied these yogic practices under different teachers and attained to the highest mystical states: but he was not satisfied with them because they did not give insight into Ultimate Reality. He considered these mystic states

> only as "happy living in this existence" (*ditthadhammasukhavihāra*), or "peaceful living" (*santavihāra*), and nothing more." (9)

Yogic techniques of the kind that were widespread during the life and times of the Buddha were absorbed into what eventually came to be regarded as Theravada orthodoxy, as set out in the Suttas and the *Visuddhimagga*. It is therefore fitting that so many followers of the Theravada and the FWBO in Britain have some previous interest in or direct experience of, yoga and that the FWBO should incorporate yoga classes into the programmes of their centres. As Rahula Walpola states, the Buddha himself made the transition from the ultimately unsatisfactory yoga techniques when he discovered the insight method (Pali - *vipassanā*), the source of his Enlightenment. [10]

King, who made a study of meditation in modern Burma, suggests it is the *vipassanā* form, in contrast to the yogic *samatha*, that is most appropriate for lay practitioners,

> "...such a discipline of thought and emotional tone is obviously more widely adaptable than the jhānic discipline, which takes immense amounts of time - a whole lifetime one might say - in a setting specifically adapted to it. It is a monk's technique. But *vipassanā*, although certainly applicable to the monk's life and absolutely necessary for his Nibbānic attainment, can be applied much more readily to ordinary daily life than can jhānic concentration." [11]

King describes *vipassanā* as,

> "...the technique for attaining Nibbāna par excellence, it is the living existential essence of the Theravada world view and the mode absolutely essential to achieving final salvation." [12]

Through vipassanā the meditator discovers for him/herself the truth about saṃsāra (the cycle of rebirth and redeath) just as the Buddha discovered all things to be impermanent (anicca), empty of self or essence (anatta) and therefore unsatisfactory (dukkha). Delusion as to the real nature of human experience and the craving for essence and permanence are the root causes of the destructive emotions of greed and anger. Once fully apprehended the illusory view of the world can be revoked in favour of wisdom (paññā), of seeing things as they really are. Then the misery and frustration caused by ignorance can be replaced by equanimity and joy.

The means by which vipassanā meditation leads the meditator to liberation is presented by Rahula Walpola as "an analytical method based on mindfulness, awareness, vigilance, observation." [13] It may or may not be preceded by the jhānic experience of samatha facilitating the power of concentration and calming the mind ready for the real work of vipassanā.

King traces the reasons for the focus on vipassanā meditation and its extension to the laity to the Burmese monasteries, where changes wrought by the impact of the British invasion were registered as indicating the decline of Buddhist piety and practice predicted in the Theravada tradition in a variety of myths. One refers to the gradual disappearance of the scriptures; first the Abhidhamma, then the Vinaya, followed by the Suttas and finally predicts the disappearance of the Sangha itself. [14]

In contemporary Burma,King detects much talk contrasting the Buddha's time with the present age, plus lamentations that "young people are less interested in Buddhism; Western science has turned many Buddhists away from faith in the Buddha way; many people of 'Buddhist' upbringing do not even know the basic Five Precepts, and so on almost ad infinitum." [15] More optimistically there is the prospect of the coming of Metteyya Buddha, the fifth and last Buddha of the present world epoch predicted by Gautama Buddha [16]. King maintains that millenarianism supports enthusiasm for meditation:

> "This occurs as follows: if on the one hand a person ought to improve his spiritual status by meditation in view of the impending total disappearance of Buddhism ...he ought on the other hand to seek to be reborn as a human being in that Metteyya epoch. In the living presence of a new Buddha the opportunity for achieving arahantship will be much better than in this decadent age when spiritual vitality is low everywhere and in everyone. And many Buddhists today do make the hopeful vow to seek to be reborn in the Metteyyan age. What better way can there be to insure this than by the present ardent meditation effort? For present Buddha-Dhamma time is running out, and it is extremely difficult to be born as a human being, let alone as a properly prepared one in an infrequent Buddha era! To successfully pin-point such a birth in the less than century-long lifetime of a historical Buddha (Metteyya in this case) fantastically multiplies the negative odds. But sufficient good kamma produced by meditation might bring this off." [17]

In Burma some of the Sangha were motivated by the "multi-faceted" sense of urgency to seek simplification of the traditional meditational apparatus and to develop "bare-insight". Among them was the influential monk Ledi Sayadaw (1856-1923) who urged lay people to at least begin meditation

while there remained an opportunity to do so [18]. His lay disciples included U Ba Khin who founded the International Meditation Centre at Rangoon in 1952.

As a fluent English speaker U Ba Khin was keen to admit English speakers of all nationalities to the ten day retreats at his centre. Many were eager to take this opportunity including an American CIA officer, John Coleman, who recounts the experience in his autobiography The Quiet Mind [19].

Another disciple of U Ba Khin was a fellow countryman U Goenka who eventually took up residence in India where he teaches "numerous foreigners and nationals." [20] Of the British people taught by Goenka several have eventually found their way to becoming disciples of Ajahn Sumedho, including two who played a central role in setting up the monastery at Harnham in Northumberland. John Coleman eventually became a meditation teacher in the U Ba Khin tradition, conducting retreats at the Buddhist Society's retreat centre at Oken Holt near Oxford, and in the north of England for a group who were the forerunners of the Harnham lay supporters. One interviewee whose meditation practice began at a retreat led by John Coleman in 1976 told me:

> "He taught me a method slightly different from the one the Sangha now use. However, it is very relevant to the British Sangha because a large number of the present monks and nuns and many devout lay people attended those courses."

Independent of Ledi Sayadaw's influence was another "Burmese" method developed by Ven. U Narada based on a fresh interpretation of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, known as the "bare

attention method." It confines the meditator to attend to whatever perceptions feelings or thoughts arise during the period of meditation without reacting to them, thus gaining insight into the impermanent nature of phenomena and the compound nature of self [21]. This method was brought before British and German audiences by the German born monk, Ven. Nyanaponika of the Island Hermitage in Sri Lanka. In 1962 his book, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation, was published in London by Rider and Company. By 1972 a fourth edition was issued and in the same year an American edition was published under the title The Power of Mindfulness. It is worth noting that in Britain the publishers retained the word Buddhist in the title, suggesting that they thought it likely to appeal to prospective readers, whereas in the USA the publishers decided otherwise.

More will be said about Nyanaponika's book shortly. What detains us for the moment is the need to consider why the impact of the lay meditation movement as it had developed in the indigenous context should matter so much for the development of Buddhism in Britain, and particularly for the establishment of the Theravada tradition. The answer is that among British Buddhists conviction concerning the theory of merit as an acceptable religious goal appears to be either weak or non-existent. Few of the lay Theravada Buddhists that I talked to during my research subscribe to the theory of merit and for some the notion is quite repugnant.

> "I just wonder who is this celestial book-keeper! To me it is a very materialistic way of looking at things. The problem for me with

> the theory of merit is that I don't like the idea whether it works or not. Even if it were true, I wouldn't want to do that any more than I want to give something to somebody because I want them to give me something back. That seems a very selfish and materialistic view."

Another interviewee said:

> "I don't think about the theory of merit at all. And I am not really bothered about it to tell you the truth."

Most typical of the general feeling is the response:

> "I don't give to gain merit. I do it because I want to."

A few are prepared to allow the concept of merit provisional acceptance. For example:

> "I will accept it and that I can transfer it to other people. I think it is very nice that at our dāna we can say that it is for all sentient beings. At the very least it is a nice thought."

Such a high degree of scepticism towards the pseudo-magical belief that "any action performed with good intent that takes the Buddha or his Sangha as its object will necessarily afford positive kammic consequences" [22] is an indication of the type of people who are attracted to Theravada Buddhism in the West. For what draws them to the monastery is the sort of self-help offered through meditation. It is therefore most unlikely that without the precedent of the movement for lay meditation in Asia, and the subsequent simplification of techniques, sufficient support could ever have been mustered to sustain an expanding British Sangha. A British Sangha could not have been founded on lay supporters whose sole religious practice was to be the making of merit.

Of the eighteen Theravada lay people that I formally interviewed only three did not pursue regular meditation practice. Almost all of the many more people that I met and talked to informally were meditators. What is meant by "regular" practice varies from once a week to twice a day. Also the pattern of a given person's meditation practice varies over time. Several months of practicing daily might be reduced to a pattern of less frequent meditation for a while and then return to a daily basis. Intermittent attendance at retreats, either for the weekend or longer, introduces an element of intense meditation of up to eight hours a day for the duration. All the meditators that I spoke to visited the monasteries partly in order to obtain instruction and guidance in meditation from experienced bhikkhus. The nature and content of that instruction will be the subject of the next section.

Patterns of Meditation Instruction in the West

Nyaponika's book The Heart of Buddhist Meditation was among the earliest manuals that transmitted the new thinking about Buddhist meditation to Western readers. A native German aiming at a readership of post-war Europeans, Nyanaponika presents the Dhamma as a source of healing and renewal for a world that is "sick and demented." It is not to be considered less relevant because its origins are foreign [23].

> "Those who raise the objection of distance in space (meaning by it, properly, the difference of race), should ask themselves whether Benares is truly more foreign to a citizen of London than Nazareth from where a teaching has issued that to that very citizen has become a familiar and important part of his life and thought." [24]

Nayanaponika's book contains a germ of the thesis, more fully elaborated by Sangharakshita, that human evolutionary progress is dependent upon the development of consciousness through Buddhist practices. The book is recommended reading for the FWBO's Mitra Study Course. In Nyanaponika's opinion humankind is threatened by "over-development of one sided brain-activity devoted solely to material ends." [25] Humanity is in danger of entering an evolutionary blind-alley where "stagnation if not catastrophe awaits." It is not only by a new advance in mental clarity, ie. in the quality of attention or mindfulness, that fresh movement and progress will be brought into the structure of modern consciousness [26]. The new advance is to be brought about by a "lofty morality," but above all by " Mindfulness in its specific aspect of Bare Attention." [27] The art of bare attention is to see things as they really are, that is "bare of labels" and without the attachment of subjective judgements. The example given by Nyanaponika is that of a person looking at his wounded arm.

> "In that case, the visual object (of contemplation) proper will consist exclusively of the respective part of the body and its damaged condition. Its different features, as flesh, blood, pus, etc., will be objects of the 'Contemplation of the Body,' in particular of the exercise concerning 'the Parts of the Body.' Pain felt owing to the wound will form an object of the 'Contemplation of Feelings.'

> The more or less conscious notion that it is an Ego, a self,that is wounded and suffers pain, will fall under the 'Contemplation of Mental Contents'.....The grudge one may feel (apparently at the same moment) against the person that caused the hurt, belongs to the "Contemplation of the State of Mind' (mind with hate) or to the "Contemplation of Mental Contents" (the Hindrance of Anger). This example will suffice to illustrate the sifting process undertaken by Bare Attention." [28]

Bare attention is meant to bring the meditator an experiential understanding of the Buddha's teaching of Dependent Origination (Pali - <u>paṭiccasamuppāda</u>). A great deal is revealed to the meditator about the workings of his or her own mind, the workings of the emotions and the reasoning powers, uncovering disguised motives and other previously hidden aspects of a person's mental life. The result is the unleashing of untapped sources of energy, knowledge and capacities and the strengthening of self-confidence "so important," according to Nyanaponika, for inner progress.

Nyanaponika maintains that the instrumental benefits that accrue from meditation practice are necessary for the patient and continuous application of the method. In other words, benefits that assist worldly life are by-products of the method, albeit welcome ones. The real goal is "that direct confrontation with actuality, which is to mature into insight." [29] The benefits are the result of "self-help" which is the only effective help. Nyanaponika supports this views with a quote from the popular Theravada text, the Dhammapada.

> "By self alone is evil done, by self one is defiled. By self is evil left undone, by self

> alone is one purified.
> "Pure and impure on self alone depends: No one can make another pure." [30]

Here is the heart not only of Buddhist meditation, but of the Protestant ethic whereby the individual stands alone - and in the case of Christianity before God - with full responsibility for his/her salvation via individual effort towards self-purification. And not by any gift of divine grace.

Nyanaponika's instructions for implementing the bare attention method come close to the synthesis of samatha and vipassanā techniques taught by the British Forest Sangha and derived from their Thai teacher Ajahn Chah. Nyanaponika gives instruction for the mindfulness of breathing technique (Pali - ānāpānasati) which may be employed as a form of samatha meditation aimed at the attainment of the jhānas and the cultivation of concentration, or for the development of insight. Mindfulness of breathing is described in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and in the Visuddhimagga. According to Nyanaponika, after establishing concentration on the process of the sequence of breaths and of paying equal attention to all the phases of the breath (inward and outwards flow), the meditator reaches the stage where "the two main strands of Buddhist meditation (samatha and vipassanā) temporarily part." [31]

The meditator performing samatha continues by calming the breath and "making the breath still more fine and subtle and its flow smoother." The idea is to "float along with the undulating flow of the breath." [32]

One who wishes to travel the direct road of insight should instead give "marked attention to the single phase of the breath, in particular to the beginning and the end." [33] The meditator becomes aware not only of the physical processes (Pali - rūpa) of breathing, but also of the mental processes (Pali - nāma) involved in concentrating upon it. Subsequently, there develops an awareness of the interdependency of mental and physical events. Through cultivating a heightened awareness of the end phase of each breath and the inception of a new phase of inhalation comes insight into impermanence. [34]

The very breath of life is analogous to all aspects of saṃsāra, and employed as an internalised and fully experienced metaphor for the teaching that everything that arises passes away.

The British Forest bhikkhus refer to insight meditation by the compound samatha-vipassanā, and their approach to teaching meditation implies a methodological inter-relatedness between the two forms. Instead of samatha being regarded as time consuming preparation for insight, the two become all of a piece together. Beginners are taught the ānāpānasati technique of "watching the breath," sometimes with the aid of what is referred to as a mantra. For example, the meditator may silently recite the word "peaceful" on the inbreath and the word "being" on the outbreath. The beginner is instructed to follow the sensation of the breath and then to maintain attention at one point, either the diaphragm or the nostrils. But here the

method is clearly not a means to jhānic states. A small booklet published at Amaravati for free distribution, Introduction to Insight Meditation, says in the section on ānāpānasati:

> "It is not necessary to develop concentration to the point of excluding everything else except the breath. Rather than to create a trance, the purpose here is to allow you to notice the workings of the mind, and to bring a measure of peaceful clarity to it." [35]

Where there is no meditation object the state of contemplation is known as "choiceless awareness," when after calming the mind and settling into meditation through ānāpānasati, the meditator is advised to "observe the flow of mental images and the sensations just as they arise, without engaging in criticism or praise." [36] Should the meditator become overwhelmed by these impressions, he or she may return to watching the breath in order to re-establish calm. The breath as an object of meditation may be relinquished once "a sense of steadiness returns." By this method ānāpānasati is incorporated into a form of insight meditation wherein the meditator contemplates the contents and operations of the mind [37].

The nature of the contents of the mind are partly determined by past and present behaviour. Feelings of guilt, shame and anxiety about behaviour, motivations and attitudes are capable of arising in the mind during meditation, sometimes attached to distant memories and sometimes as the preoccupations of the present. The meditator is advised not to repress these thoughts and feelings, nor to wallow in

them, but simply to acknowledge them and the discomfort they bring. They will pass away even as the mind becomes distracted by new material, or the meditator returns to watching the breath. At Amaravati and its associated monasteries the bhikkhus teach that the effectiveness of meditation depends on its being established on a foundation of moral living (sīla). In their own case this comes from observance of the Vinaya. Lay people have only the far less stringent guide-lines of the Five Precepts (the Eight Precepts when staying at the monastery).

In Theravada countries dāna (generosity) and sīla precede bhāvanā in the hierarchy of religious practices. When Carrithers suggested to Sri Lankan forest monks that sīla might be the result rather than the precursor of bhāvanā his conjecture was met with "impatience and even outrage." In Sri Lanka sīla held an "axiomatically fundamental place." [38] In passing Carrithers muses that his heterodox proposal typifies the attitudes of Westerners who have adopted Buddhism for its "promise of release through self-cultivation."

> "But it is difficult for Westerners steeped in ideas of Christian charity or social relevance to stop there, and it is commonly expected that self-cultivation will be the medium for a transformation which will further render the meditator fit and compassionate." [39]

Carrithers' reflection is matched by a quotation from a talk given by a young English monk who spoke about his early experience of Buddhism.

> "I was interested in meditation, not morality or giving. But I began to notice that what I

> had to sit (meditate) with was related to my day. If I was stirred up it was because I had been shouting or something. So I became a reluctant keeper of the Five Precepts. I felt the value of that so I was prepared to make the effort.
>
> "It is a question of how skilfully you use what you have. Lay people begin by wanting tranquillity, but what they often learn through meditation is more willingness to bear with things."

During 1988 a group of lay people and monks mounted an exhibition at Amaravati based on replies by fifty respondents to a postal questionnaire relating to Theravada lay practice in Britain. Of the total respondents seventy one per cent said that they devoted some time each day to meditation. Twenty four per cent said that they sometimes found time during the day for meditation and only five per cent said that they did not do so.

On the whole, during my interviews with lay people I found it difficult to get them to talk about the specifics of their meditation practice, perhaps because it is such a personal matter. All agreed that they found the results beneficial in terms of personal transformation, though most found it difficult to describe precisely the kinds of changes that were brought about.

> "Usually other people notice the changes in you. You are not aware of having changed. I hope that the changes are more realism, more sensitivity, more tolerance and less self-righteousness and more awareness of others."

For some the transformation enables new undertakings. One man told me:

> "I am less fussed. And the Buddhism has helped me to work at the local hospice. It frightens the hell out of me. But then I know

this is the way it is. And being frightened isn't so bad."

Others revealed that they had altered some of their habits since becoming meditators so that visits to the pub were no longer the focus of their social lives. Some said they spent less time in front of the television. One woman had abandoned watching television altogether, because she now felt it to be a trivial distraction.

Respondents to the Amaravati survey as well as my own informants clearly regarded meditation as something that continues beyond the period of formal "sitting". Its meaning and purpose is extended through the practice of mindfulness in every day life, especially in relation to reflecting on the meaning of the Five Precepts and their detailed application. Responding to the events and experiences of daily life is part and parcel of a person's meditation practice as illustrated by the following remark.

> "Lay people have to deal with many things like money, work, etc., that can either distract from meditation or be used as meditation in action, reflecting on whatever arises."

Some see the integration of meditation into lay life to be an even greater challenge than entering the monastery.

> "The main benefits (of lay practice) I take to be is the constant testing out of our ability to handle things like sex and money and close personal relationships from which the Sangha are exempt. Sometimes it is easier to give them up entirely than handle them with wisdom, and this is one benefit of lay practice."

Another respondent to the Amaravati questionnaire said:

> "You have to be very strong as a lay Buddhist in this country to maintain meditation and the Precepts in the face of so much pressure to

> the contrary. Lay life is much more complex and demanding in some ways, but it develops proportional strengths."

The cultivation of an ethical dimension underpinning and proceeding from meditation practice, that is seen by the majority as the development of a more compassionate and caring attitude towards others, is given prime expression through regular participation in the metta-bhāvanā meditation drawn from the samatha set of meditations. It is frequently taught and practised by the bhikkhus as a practical application of the cardinal Buddhist virtue of good-will (Pali - mettā), as it is said to be both a means for suffusing the world with thoughts bearing mettā and an opportunity for the meditator to internalise and habituate himself/herself to the mettā mode of thought.

For the mettā-bhāvanā the meditator usually works in stages beginning by directing the qualities of tolerance and forgiveness towards himself/herself. Joining the sense of loving acceptance to the movement of the breath the meditator silently says, "May I be well." The following stages are outlined in the previously mentioned handbook.

> "Then reflect on people you love and respect, and wish them well one by one. Move on to friendly acquaintances, then to those towards whom you feel indifferent. 'May they be well.' Finally, bring to mind those people you fear or dislike, and continue to send out wishes of good-will.
>
> "This meditation can expand, in a movement of compassion, to include all people in the world, in their many circumstances. And remember, you don't have to feel that you love everyone in order to wish them well." [40]

Alternating the metta-bhāvanā practice with the samatha-vipassanā meditation is taught by the monks to bring out the ethical qualities inherent in the latter, and to remind the meditator of his interconnectedness with all sentient beings. This interconnectedness is two-fold. Firstly, as there is no eternal and abiding self there are no fixed boundaries between self and others in any real or absolute sense. Liberation is a boundless state. Secondly, even in the relative sense in which we experience ourselves as separate human beings we know that we do not wish to suffer. Common sense reflection causes us to realise that the same is true for all creatures. The link between this realisation and its implications for our behaviour towards others is epitomised in the following extract from the Mettā Sutta, which Gombrich describes as the most widely used Pali text [41].

> "Let not one deceive another nor despise any person whatever in any place. In anger or ill will let not one wish any harm to another.
> "Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so let one cultivate a boundless heart towards all human beings.
> "Let one's thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world - without obstruction, without any hatred, without enmity."

Meditation in the FWBO

The mettā-bhāvanā is one of two basic meditation techniques to be taught at the beginners' meditation classes held at FWBO centres throughout the country, even though at this stage the meditators may know very little about Buddhism. Some may never go on to find out more, but such

classes are permanently on offer at the FWBO's urban centres because experience has shown that a small percentage of those attending a beginners' class will establish an enduring association with the Movement. One Order member who has been involved with countless beginners' classes over the years said:

> "We recognise that for each person who becomes an Order Member there are probably a couple of thousand who just go to classes. But you won't get your one Order Member unless you have 2,000 people. Also, even if people go away having done the Mindfulness of Breathing for five weeks and will never do it again, it will have a positive influence. We are happy to contribute that anyway. It is strange how some people do a bit and disappear and you think that's that, but then five, even ten years later they reappear having been meditating quietly by themselves and feel that they need to make contact. Even changed circumstances can bring them back."

There is a certain feeling among Order Members that teaching meditation to large numbers of people is a "good thing" in itself, because it helps people to calm down so that their behaviour is less motivated by stress and they therefore cause less stress to others. In this way teaching meditation can be regarded as a means of contributing towards the general good. Preliminary classes at FWBO centres teach only samatha meditation in the two forms of ānāpānasati and mettā-bhāvanā. The synthesizing of samatha and vipassanā techniques is not taught in the FWBO. Only after the full preparatory work of attaining the jhānas is accomplished are practitioners encouraged to move on to the vipassanā or to take up the various options drawn from Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions. Even as the meditator progresses, and learns

about Buddhism, he or she continues with the samatha practice.

The first jhāna, sometimes translated absorption, is characterised by moments when the focus of attention on the meditation object (in this instance the breath) is so intense that the clutter of distracting thoughts die away. Gradually this leads to what is known in the FWBO as integration.

> "Not only are the scattered elements of the conscious personality temporarily integrated but energies from deeper subconscious levels are also released and unified into one's total awareness." [42]

In the second stage the residual thought processes that are present in the first stage are overcome and attention withdrawn from the senses.

> "One feels in touch with a far wider and higher dimension of consciousness which wells up in one...At this stage one experiences that higher dimension of awareness as something outside one which is filtering into one's being." [43]

By the third jhāna, the stage of permeation, "that higher dimension has completely penetrated one's own being." [44] The final and fourth jhāna is the stage of radiation. "One begins to radiate a positive influence and to transform any disturbances." [45]

In the Pali texts the four jhānas are linked to four other attainments known as the Formless States (Pali - brahmavihāras). There is a complicated relationship between the jhānas and the brahmavihāras [46] and sometimes the latter are placed above the former. However, the fourth jhāna represents the level of attainment most helpful to the

successful introduction of the vipassanā techniques. Precisely how long the preparatory period might take depends on the individual. Subhuti supposes that "some experience of the stages of integration is likely within the first few months of regular practice." [47]

The two samatha meditations are regarded as the basic framework into which a wide range of meditation practices can be inserted. These include the Soto Zen practice of sesshin or "just sitting." Here the meditator sits quietly with no concepts of techniques in mind. The point is to experience ones beingness and the "play of one's energies." [48] This can be done at any time and by a practitioner at any stage along the path.

In the FWBO Vajrayāna practices are specified as being for more advanced practitioners. The Vajrayāna methods were developed in Tibet under the influence of Tantric practices and pre-Buddhist Bon elements. The meditator learns and inwardly visualises detailed forms known as maṇḍalas, which are iconographic representations of the "basic forces, good and bad within the meditator himself." [49] Of particular importance in the FWBO are those meditations that involve the visualisation of "archetypal Buddha and Bodhisattva figures and recitation of the associated mantras." [50] Subhuti describes the visualisation of the Bodhisattva Manjugosha, the embodiment of transcendental wisdom, and its significance for the meditator thus:

> "One imagines first an infinite expanse of clear blue sky and one experiences at the same time its emotional counterpart, a feeling of

> openness and expansiveness. In the midst of the sky before one, one sees a great blue lotus blossom in the calyx of which is seated a very beautiful youth, unmistakenly male, but with a feminine softness and grace. His skin glows golden yellow and he is adorned as a prince with rich garments and jewelled ornaments, and on his head is a five-pointed crown. In his right hand he holds aloft the flaming sword of Wisdom, which finely cuts through all delusion and ignorance. With his left hand he presses the book of the Perfection of Wisdom, the quintessence of the Dharma, to his heart. After gazing at this figure and repeating his mantra, Om Ah Ra Pa Ca Na Dhih, many times, the figure is dissolved back into the blue sky which in its turn dissolves away." [51]

During their ordination ceremony each Order Member is taught a visualisation practice that is considered appropriate to his or her personality.

The potential for self-transformation is the feature of meditation most emphasised within the FWBO. Meditation practice is part of the way to becoming a True Individual.

> "Whenever I feel that I am not getting anywhere and wonder why I am doing it, I recall what Sangharakshita said about meditation...that the aim is not to have a good meditation, but to transform yourself. I suppose that I have taken on the meditation aspect of Buddhism as a means not just to have a nice set of ideas, but actually to change the way that I act in my life and work as a teacher."

Retreats

As part of the ongoing programme for self-transformation FWBO members are encouraged to undertake solitary retreats. A Mitra described to me the three weeks he spent in an isolated cottage practising meditation for six hours a day.

> "You get into an expanded state of consciousness, where you are just delighted to

listen to the wind through the trees and see the different colour of the sky. You are quite content being where you are and with what you have got. There is no craving for anything other than the present moment. Unfortunately you can't maintain that state, but gradually, practising meditation over a period of months and years the general level of consciousness does get higher."

Solitary retreats are sometimes undertaken by Theravada lay people, but for most people retreats happen in a group led by a senior monk or nun. Group retreats are prominent among FWBO activities where the initial experience of an organised retreat may often be the catalyst for someone at the level of Friend to deepen their involvement. An Order Member told me how he began to consider becoming a Mitra after his first weekend retreat.

> "A certain amount of momentum had probably been building up without me being aware of it, and the opportunity of meditating with others for a long period of time and getting into much more concentrated states I found very rewarding indeed."

Another Order Member who in his early days of contact with the Movement was struggling to understand a visionary experience that had come to him out of the blue, while sitting alone on a beach in Portugal, subsequently attended his first retreat.

> "I learnt these meditation techniques and they didn't seem to be moving in the direction of that experience. It just seemed to be hard work and gave me neck ache, but the combination of actually doing it and talking to people and hearing Sangharakshita's taped talks about the difference between vision and transformation...well by the end of the retreat I realised that if I was ever going to make sense out of the vision I had to find a path. From then on I was hooked."

FWBO retreats may vary in length from a weekend to two or more weeks and often adopt particular themes such as Going For Refuge or Mindfulness. Some are restricted to Mitras, or Order Members. Most, but not all, are single sex and are held at one of the Movement's own retreat centres. Some involve activities other than meditation and study, including gardening, Aikido or Karate. Retreats are organised for the Chairmen of FWBO centres, for selecting Mitras for the Dharmachari/Dharmacharini ordination, as well as the three month ordination retreats in Spain. Depending on the style of the retreat periods of silence may be observed.

FWBO retreats bring together members of the Movement from different parts of the country in close face to face relations, creating bonds of friendship that consolidate the communications networks. In this way retreats play a part in maintaining the FWBO's corporate identity, and act as a buffer against tendencies towards fragmentation that might arise from the autonomy granted to individual centres. For the individual they promote feelings of belonging to a wider community of Buddhists. Combined with the high value placed on friendship within the FWBO the retreat setting, bounded and isolated from the intrusions of the non-Buddhist world, provides a social environment where close personal ties are facilitated and affirmed.

Lay Theravada retreats at the special retreat centre at Amaravati are far less overtly interactional, as conversation is entirely discouraged. A retreatant may have one or more interviews with the retreat leader and ask questions when the

retreat leader gives a talk. Otherwise a convention of silence is observed for the duration of the retreat, which may be up to three weeks.

The retreat centre at Amaravati is a separate unit with its own kitchens and sleeping quarters. Unlike ordinary guests at the monastery retreatants do not work or help with cooking, which is done by volunteers. Most of the day is spent doing sitting or walking meditation. Attending retreats is not considered essential for lay people, whereas in the FWBO Mitras who are serious about becoming Order Members are expected to attend retreats. One active Theravada layman and meditator that I interviewed had, at the time, not attended a retreat and had no short term plans to do so. Only one Theravada lay interviewee pointed to a retreat as an important early experience precipitating deeper involvement. Those who do attend see retreats as significant interludes in the continuity of their practice.

> "With other distractions kept to a minimum retreats give an ideal opportunity to see one's own mind and to learn from them. They are a tremendous boost to practice and one tends to appreciate them and realise their benefit."

Sometimes return to the domain of ordinary life is harsh. The peace and calm of the retreat can "make the outside world more stressful afterwards." One respondent to the Amaravati survey spoke of feeling "drained" after retreats and on two occasions becoming ill. Nevertheless, the overall reaction to retreats among my informants and those who responded to the Amaravati survey is to the

positive aspect of "keeping the awareness on tiptoe and all the moral nerves brushed up and tingling."

The intense period of meditation seems to revitalise individual commitment to solitary practice at home. Some people go on retreat once a year others more often, but whatever the frequency, going on retreat is a repeated ritual of renewal. As one layperson expressed it:

> "My practice slips away so I find I am doing less sitting. A retreat gets you back on track. You learn again and then you start going off the rails and then another retreat gets you back."

Looked at like this the collective setting of the retreat, despite (perhaps in some ways due to) the lack of verbal communication between participants is a tangible validation of the Buddhist path, and of the resolve to put forth effort as embodied in the Sixth Factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Effort (Pali - sammāvāyāma). Retreats are often described as "supportive of one's practice" and many people use the same phrase to refer to the effect of meditating as part of a group in contexts other than retreats.

At the monasteries and at the FWBO centres meditation is usually preceded by a liturgical ritual or puja. The exceptions are generally beginners' classes. Even at a lay Theravada meditation group meeting in a member's home candles will be lit and very likely incense too. Seating is often according to a prescribed pattern, for example at Amaravati the monks form one group together with the anagarikas , the nuns form another with the anagarikās and the lay people

another. These three groups are ranged in rows as around three sides of a square . If Ajahn Sumedho is in residence he sits before the shrine, facing the lay people, with the monks to his left and the nuns to his right. During the meditation the monks and nuns, who otherwise face one another, turn to face the Buddha image and their teacher with their eyes closed or downcast. The seating arrangement brings together the component members of the sāvaka-saṅgha, that is all who go for refuge to the Three Jewels of Buddhism. During the chanting preceding meditation homage is paid to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. At the FWBO centre a puja prior to meditation will take either the English form of chanting (The Short Puja) or the Pali form of the Ti Ratana Vandana (Salutation to the Three Jewels). The FWBO Puja Book explains:

> "Both of these practices express devotional feelings towards the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and thus their recitation puts us emotionally in touch with our ideals, and therefore with our highest and deepest motivating energies before we meditate." [52]

These liturgical rituals preceding meditation, and the symbolic spatial arrangements, translate the individualistic meanings inherent in meditation into a collective public domain. Shared silence is also, as I hope to show, charged with symbolic significance.

Sometimes Buddhists say that even if meditation becomes difficult the act of sitting still and without speaking for a set period of time accrues benefit and restores calm. A high value is placed on silence as a condition conducive to

expanding the mind and experiencing what is referred to by the bhikkhus and nuns as the mind's "spaciousness". They also teach that extraneous noise is to be tolerated during meditation. What counts is the self-imposed cessation of external discourse in favour of "investigating the mind."

Practicing meditation in a group is not by any means universal. Carrithers informs me that forest monks in Sri Lanka normally meditate alone and this is the case in some sections of the Theravada lay meditation movement, as John Coleman reports of the International Meditation Centre in Rangoon [53]. Kornfield however notes that in the meditation monasteries of Burma, Laos and Thailand, as opposed to meditation centres, monks and lay visitors convene at least twice a day to meditate together [54]. This is the pattern followed by Ajahn Chah's disciples in Britain, where morning chanting is followed by meditation, with a similar pattern for the evening when the gathering may be completed by a Dhamma talk from a senior bhikkhu.

The shared silence of the meditation room enables the individual participant, concerned with his or her own efforts towards spiritual progress, to be unified in fellowship with other seekers. For Buddhists only silence can express the Ultimate Reality. The Buddha himself is said to be "beyond the paths of speech." and cannot be fully conceived in visual or auditory form. Nyanatiloka provides the following translation from a portion of the Majjhima Nikāya.

> "After overcoming all vain thoughts, one is called a 'silent thinker.' And the thinker, the Silent One, does no more arise, no more

> pass away, no more tremble, no more desire. For there is nothing in him whereby he should rise again." [55]

Silence then is a key Buddhist symbol, employed metaphorically as above and given experientially in meditation. Silence is more revealing than sound in the form of language which is merely a conventional construct and can convey only relative truth (Pali - samvṛti), hence the imperative of the Third Factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Speech (Pali - sammāvācā).

Theravada bhikkhus may only talk on Dhamma when requested to do so and among the disciples of Ajahn Chah each discourse on Dhamma must be extemporaneous and "offered from the heart." According to the Canon the ideal bhikkhu is one who avoids vain talk.

> "He speaks at the right time, in accordance with facts, speaks what is useful, speaks of the law and the discipline; his speech is like treasure, uttered at the right moment, accompanied by arguments, moderate and full of sense." [56]

Ajahn Sumedho teaches the British laity that the least a practicing Buddhist can do is to "keep the Five Precepts so that our bodies and speech are not being used for disruption, cruelty and exploitation on this planet." In the associative silence of a group meditation the potential discord inherent in speech is replaced by corporate silence and its intimations of harmony.

The Quaker (Society of Friends) view of the value of silence and the place accorded to it in religious practice and doctrine bears interesting comparison with the Buddhist material. Like the Buddhists the "primary Quaker attitude

towards speech was one of distrust." [57] Seventeenth century Quakers advocated a linguistic style termed "plain speech," which Bauman describes as "appropriate, unadorned, minimal speech." [58] In worldly talk Quakers were urged to "let their words be few," although the same did not apply to preaching. [59]

For Quakers the voice of God, the Inner Light, was to be found through silent waiting and introspection. By "making the speaking of God within man the core religious experience of their movement, the Quakers elevated speaking and silence to an especially high degree of symbolic centrality and importance." [60] Inner reflection was the "irreducible element of individual worship and the basic building block of collective worship as well." [61] Quakers met together in pure stillness and silence of all flesh to "wait in the light." Bauman demonstrates how the early meeting for worship was nevertheless far more than an aggregate of individuals turning inwards.

> "What the Quakers sought within themselves was that God in every person. Accordingly, the very process of turning inward to the Light in each other's presence was in fact a powerfully unifying one because all were waiting 'in one spirit.' Waiting silently together the participants in the meeting achieved 'communion', the word they themselves employed." [62]

Modern Quakers, such as George H. Gorman in his book The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship, draw upon the spiritual writings of their seventeenth century forebears to explain the value of silence both "for the exploration of the

interior life" and for "loving communion" ; when the latter occurs the meeting for worship is said to be "gathered."

> "The only outward sign of it is a great depth of silence, the intensity of which may literally be felt, for all restlessness has been stilled. When this point has been reached the group has become a 'gathered meeting,' and a new dimension colours its corporate life." [63]

In a similar way the corporate silence of the Buddhist meditation room creates the company of the sāvaka-saṅgha, which in the Theravada monastery includes monks, nuns, novices and lay people and in the FWBO Order Members, Mitras and Friends. As Ajahn Sumedho puts it group meditation contributes to the "confidence of the individual's intention to become enlightened." Within a congregational setting it is therefore clear that the intensely intrapersonal activity of meditation takes on an interpersonal dimension.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

"...WORTHY OF GIFTS, WORTHY OF HOSPITALITY"

The Theravada Sangha is an object of esteem for lay people in Britain and the focus of their generosity. Precisely why this is so and the active processes by which it is implemented form the major topic for consideration in the present chapter.

As briefly described in Chapter Two the ideology of merit forms the basis of the reciprocal relationship between lay people and monks in the Theravada countries, including Thailand where the British Forest Sangha has its origins. Both Bunnag [1] and Tambiah [2] have demonstrated how in Thailand giving to monks exists through a variety of forms and types of occasion. In their respective ethnographies dāna (generosity) appears as a largely collective and publicly visible display with implications for social networks extending well beyond the sole purpose of maintaining a religious elite. An elaborate system of mutual assistance and patterns of obligation are involved in defraying the cost to individuals of participation in merit making ceremonies, enabling relatives, friends and neighbours to demonstrate and affirm social ties.

Whether it be in the relatively sophisticated small town setting of Ayutthaya in Central Thailand, where Bunnag's study took place, or in the remote North Eastern village of Ban Phran Maun, where Tambiah carried out fieldwork, reciprocity is a "conspicuous social norm." [3] Tambiah writes:

> "It is expressed in mutual aid in economic tasks in which the notion of equivalence of giving and receiving is explicit. It is also expressed in household rites and ceremonials at which the guests make gifts of cash; the amounts given are scrupulously noted down and the equivalent value (or a little more) is given when the donor stages his own ceremonial. This institution is analogous to a credit mechanism. Gifts to the monks never return in material equivalent form. The idiom of such transfers is that of 'free gift,' where the donor's altruistic intention has ethical value. The receiver is the monk, who in accepting confers merit on the donor." [4]

Furthermore, in this kind of community the monk, or monks, in question are in all likelihood either kinsmen or neighbours of the donor.

Bunnag's data from Ayutthaya additionally illustrates how social and economic status is articulated through the protocol surrounding the appropriate amounts of assistance that one layman might appropriately donate to another in helping with the cost of merit making ceremonies. All this amounts to what Pierre Bourdieu has defined as the workings of "symbolic capital" through which the normative transactions of socio-economic relations among peasant communities are maintained [5]
It is a form of symbolic exchange that cannot be automatically transferred to the context of post-industrial Britain's consumer society and "disenchanted economy of naked self interest." [6] As was made clear in Chapter Six, the ideology of merit has little significance for the new Theravada Buddhists of the West with results that entail a number of consequences. Not least of these

is the necessity of appealing to other reasons for individuals to invest in the upkeep of the bhikkhu-saṅgha, thereby setting in motion a series of further shifts in doctrinal emphasis.

In the virtual absence of the doctrine of merit the principle of Enlightenment becomes the central religious goal for lay people and monks. However if Enlightenment is the single end of religious practice it is no longer tenable to perceive it as a far distant goal hundreds and hundreds of life-times away. Relevance must be restored to the given moment and nirvana (Pali - nibbāna) shown to be realistically attainable at least by degrees. Ajahn Sumedho teaches that the aim of Buddhist practice is to know what Buddhas know - that

> "...there is not any eternal or soul-like quality, no substance in these things that one could call a permanent possession. The One Who Knows knows that if it arises, it passes away - you don't have to know any more to be a Buddha.......Be that Buddha who knows, by putting energy into experiencing your life here and now, not by getting lost in the idea of being a Buddha." [7]

Clearly all are meant to share the one religious goal, but this has not had the effect of levelling all differences between lay people and members of the monastic Sangha. The latter remains an object of esteem for lay people in Britain and the focus for their generosity. Precisely why this is so and the active processes by which

it is implemented form the major topic for consideration in the present chapter.

Studying the Form

When newcomers arrive at the British Theravada Buddhist monasteries they find themselves being slowly inducted into the rights and wrongs of how to relate to bhikkhus. Sometimes learning these rules of etiquette is described as getting to understand the "form." Form is a word also frequently applied by monks and lay persons to the totality of the monastic conventions. A monk might be heard to say, "This form provides me with the foundations for mindfulness." Or a lay person might be heard to remark, "Oh! I wouldn't do that because it might offend against the form."

Form, when used in the above sense, indicates tangible patterns of singular and collective behaviours that give actual shape to "the Holy Life". The form is derived from the Vinaya and constitutes its visible and behaviourally delineated expression. The manner of the bhikkhu's appearance; his comportment; that which he is permitted to do, own, and say and that which he is not; the time of his rising from sleep; his mealtimes; the conditions for his relations with other bhikkhus and with the laity - all are determined by the Vinaya discipline, which is strictly interpreted and followed in all four British monasteries.

Over and above the Vinaya, the British Sangha observe certain conventions drawn from the *dhutanga* practices, for example, each monk mixes all the food that is offered to him in his one permitted alms bowl. If the menu consists of rice, spicy beans, potatoes and lemon meringue pie then - as I have witnessed - into the one bowl it will all go. Kindly lay people who serve the bhikkhus with the main meal, eaten before noon, tend to fastidiously place incompatible items as far apart as possible within the confines of the commodious bowl, though ardent monks are sure to mix it all up afterwards. Food is intended only to support the flesh and not provide a source of sensuous pleasure.

After the food is served, and prior to it being consumed, the monks chant together in Pali and in English (or sometimes a single monk may speak in English) the Reflections on the Four Requisites (robe, almsfood, lodging and medicine). The verse regarding food runs:

> "Wisely reflecting, I use almsfood: not for fun, not for pleasure, not for fattening, not for beautification.
>
> Only for the maintenance and nourishment of this body,
>
> For keeping it healthy, for helping with the Holy Life;
>
> Thinking thus: "I will allay hunger without overeating,
>
> So that I may continue to live blamelessly and at ease."

On most days the meal at Amaravati is prepared by anagarikas/ās and lay people in the large kitchen using food that has been brought to the monastery by lay people and stored by the anagarikas/ās. It will be recalled that monks are not permitted to store food. On some days the entire meal is donated, prepared and cooked by groups of people. Families of Asian origin in particular like to do this in order to mark a family anniversary. During the summer when more lay guests visit the monastery, especially at weekends, the kitchen may have to cater for up to a hundred people. Fortunately, as most visitors come bearing gifts of food and other items there is generally sufficient to go round.

Once the food is set out on the special counter in the main meeting hall (Pali - sālā) a gong is struck and everyone assembles seated in the pattern described in Chapter Six. All bow three times to the shrine containing the large Buddha image (Pali - buddharūpa). The laity designated to offer the food then stand in readiness behind the serving counter to await the monks, nuns and anagarikas who line up in groups and according to seniority. The monks are served first, then the nuns and finally the anagarikas and anagarikās. As the several items of food are deposited in his bowl the bhikkhu remains silent. Having received the offering he returns slowly, in a composed manner, to take up his mat on the floor of the sālā. Before sitting he kneels and bows to

the shrine. The entire monastic community follow the same procedure.

Next the lay people take up their allotted places facing the shrine and perform a triple bow. The monks and nuns then chant the Reflection on the Four Requisites. On its completion they place the palms of their hands together, fingers pointed upwards and with the hands held in front of the chest and bow their heads. This is the gesture of respect common in South Asian cultures known as añjali. There follows a brief period of silent contemplation after which the monastics repeat the añjali gesture and maintaining silence begin to eat. At this point the lay people repeat the triple bow, arise and quietly line up to serve themselves the remainder of the food. Lay people who wish to remain in the sālā to eat may do so providing they too maintain silence. They have the option of retiring to a small adjoining room where they may sit at a table and quiet conversation is permitted. On fine days lay people sometimes take their food outdoors.

After the meal is over, the monastics usually wash their own bowls. The Vinaya makes special reference to the treatment of the alms bowl, which one bhikkhu informed me must be revered "as if it is the head of the Buddha."

It is significant that the alms bowl, which most obviously stands for the bhikkhu's dependence on the laity, should be analogous to the sacred head of the

Buddha, founder of the Order and personification of the principle of Enlightenment. Bearing in mind this cluster of images, together with the ritual details of the daily meal, it becomes possible to trace some of the essential features of the relationship between the monastic Sangha and its lay supporters.

Lay people supply and serve the cooked food which the monks and nuns wearing properly arranged robes receive silently and without any individual expression of gratitude. They do so in an orderly and gracious display appropriate to those who are according to the traditional formula "worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality" (Pali - āhuṇeyyo pāhuṇeyyo). Unless a member of the monastic community is ill he or she must eat in the company of the others. Together they reflect on the fact that what they are about to eat is "almsfood" and to be consumed merely for the "maintenance and nourishment of the body". Lay people are free to eat elsewhere, as indeed the majority invariably choose to do, and are not enjoined to silence. For in this, as in all things, they follow a practice that is less strict, thereby contributing to the logic that accords primacy to the monastic community.

The boundary between the laity and the bhikkhu-saṅgha is also marked by the collective acts of the Sangha from which the lay people are excluded, for example the fortnightly uposatha recitation. Privacy and secrecy have important functions in religious orders, because they

isolate members from the larger society and confer a sense of privileged status [8].

Even when shorn of the ideology of merit (which is likely to be restored when the donors are of Asian origin) the relationship between monastics and lay people are consistently attended by ritualised behaviour indicative of a spiritual hierarchy with the bhikkhus pre-eminent. At the same time the metaphor that moves from the alms bowl to the ideal of Enlightenment, via the Buddha's head, demonstrates the Sangha's acute awareness of its debt to the laity whose generosity undergirds the entire edifice. The fact that all Sangha property, from the fabric of the buildings to the smallest item, has been "sincerely offered" by the laity causes it to be treated with particular respect. Tool stores are festooned with notices reminding users that the objects therein are _dāna_ and therefore to be treated with care. Waste is assiduously avoided and senior monks tutor their juniors in the ethic of conserving what has been given.

The _añjali_ gesture is repeatedly directed by lay people towards monks and nuns at greetings and farewells, at the conclusion of an offering and sometimes when it is the lay person's turn to speak during a conversation with a monk. Monks, on the other hand, do not return the _añjali_ gesture to lay people. Monks and nuns do not touch lay people, nor should they be touched by them. When people who are not familiar with the conventions

unwittingly shake hands when introduced to a monk this rule is overlooked, because it is considered pointless to embarrass well meaning folk. If the new relationship persists, the rules of conduct will eventually be tactfully explained by the monk.

In a pamphlet produced by the monks at Amaravati in 1986 entitled A Lay Buddhists Guide to the Monks' Code of Conduct the following advice is given.

> "Apart from the obvious reminder to sit up for a Dhamma talk rather than loll or recline on the floor, one shows a manner of deference by ducking slightly if having to walk between a bhikkhu and the person he is speaking to. Similarly one would not stand looming over a bhikkhu to talk to him or offer him something, but rather approach him at the level at which he is sitting." [9]

It is considered appropriate for lay people to bow to a senior monk who is their teacher. The triple bow, mentioned earlier, is made by kneeling with the hands in the añjali position then tipping the body forward, with hands flat on the floor, until the forehead also touches the floor while keeping the buttocks close to the heels.

The section of the Guide dealing with how to offer food and drink gives this advice:

> "It is instructive to note that rather than limiting what can be offered, the Vinaya lays emphasis on the mode of offering. It regards the proper way of offering as being when the lay person approaches within forearm's distance of the bhikkhu, has a respectful manner (so for example, one would try to be lower than the bhikkhu) and is offering something the bhikkhu can manage to carry! All this serves to make the act of offering a mindful and

> reflective one, irrespective of what one is giving - and allows great joy to arise."

Monks and lay people relating to one another through the regularities and norms enshrined in the conventions, are acting out the spiritual realities to which they jointly subscribe. One monk described the monastic system as being rather like "a theatre where you are entering a Dhamma environment and you become part of this Dhamma theatre." The role ascribed to the lay people is that of

> ".... using the monks' form as a symbol of qualities that we regard highly like commitment, living very simply, renunciation, purity, devotion to meditation."

These then are the spiritual values that are dramatised within the framework of ritualised reciprocity. The Guide describes that framework as follows:

> "The Buddhist Monk's Discipline is a refined mode of conduct which is conducive to the arising of mindfulness and wisdom. This Discipline called Vinaya, is not an end in itself, but merely an efficacious tool which can be instrumental in leading to the end of suffering.
>
> "Apart from the direct training that the Vinaya affords, it also establishes a relationship with lay people without whose co-operation it would be difficult to live as a bhikkhu. A bhikkhu is able to live as a mendicant because lay people respect the monastic conventions and are prepared to help support him. This gives rise to a relationship of respect and gratitude in which both lay persons and bhikkhus are called upon to practise their particular life-styles and responsibilities with sensitivity and sincerity."

Note that it is the "monastic convention" that lay people are enjoined to respect and which is the ideal

inspiration for generosity and not the personal attractions of individual monks. Lay people are actively encouraged to make gifts to the Sangha rather than to individual monks. The bhikkhu is said to have "put aside personality," symbolised by the removal of distinguishing physical features such as head hair and eye-brows. Bikkhus are to look as much like one another as is possible given the specificity of the human form and physiognomy. Identical robes prevent any personal idiosyncracy being expressed through dress. This is not to say that each bhikkhu's particularity as a human being is subject to enforced suppression, but rather that the trappings of personal image and style are abandoned in favour of the bhikkhu style and manner of comportment. Thus cast the actor conducts himself within the constraints of the role according to the impulses of his specific nature, subject as it is to change, and with no artifice beyond the prescribed etiquette of the bhikkhu form.

Gilbert Lewis has pointed out that ritual cannot always be easily "demarcated from other kinds of custom." [10] Also, where the distinction is possible to the extent that it is made by the participants its meaning may remain "indeterminate, private, various and individual." [11] This is likely to be the situation facing most anthropologists in most contexts, but because the conventions of the Theravada Sangha are so new to Britain

they have to be continually explained. The monks coach the lay people and experienced lay people coach newcomers. This means that the conventions are frequently discussed and their symbolic significance explicated.

The monks readily acknowledge the symbolic content of the form and are able to make explicit a coherent interpretation of its meaning. Ritual exegesis, under the guise of explaining the conventions, is part and parcel of teaching lay people how to behave like Buddhists. During 1988 Scottish lay people held a weekend retreat at Harnham monastery in order to receive special instruction in the various conventions such as bowing, chanting and relating to monks.

Lay people speak of a variety of reasons for giving to monks, beginning with the pragmatic observation that without support "there will be no monastery for me to go to." The Sangha is frequently referred to as providing a sound spiritual and ethical example to lay people. An informant said:

> "A lot of people like the discipline. There is so little discipline outside. You have got the contrast every time you put the television on or pick up the paper. I know you can't live in splendid isolation, the world has to go on, but it is nice that there is a more calming influence somewhere."

Because the Sangha has preserved the teachings of the Buddha over the centuries some lay people feel that by offering <u>dāna</u> they are linked to a tradition stretching

back to the time of the Buddha..."I feel that by the act of giving I am part of the whole."

One woman explained the interconnectedness she experienced through giving to the Sangha by comparison with what she had felt as a church-goer.

> "I felt that the Vicar was very distant and even his affability was just a technique. I never fed the Vicar or bought his clothes. My collection had no connection with the needs of the Vicar. If one had no collection one was socially disgraced, so it was a talisman against shame, a guarantee of respectability."

Others say that they give out of gratitude for the teaching and spiritual counselling they receive. One woman said she gave to the monks and nuns because "they have given me so much." While the "joy of giving" is the reason for generosity which is most encouraged by the monks few of the lay people that I spoke to mentioned it.

The amounts and types of donations vary from small but regular amounts of cash to groceries and other necessities, through to large sums of several hundred or thousands of pounds to cover the cost of building and renovations. British lay people, unlike their Asian counterparts, prefer to give unobtrusively. The box of groceries slipped into the kitchen, the plain brown envelope dropped into the dāna box, and the banker's order for a regular covenanted figure known only to the treasurer of the Trustees are the usual means of "making dāna" in Britain

The kind of ongoing train of fund-raising events such as jumble sales, bazaars, etc., associated with Christian churches is not yet a feature of Buddhist lay life. Organising anything of that kind is forbidden to monks. The exception is an event organised each year by lay supporters of the Harnham monastery in Newcastle. Known as the Multi Cultural Fair it raises money for the Sanghamitta fund to finance a building project. The event was initiated partly to dispel what lay Buddhists felt to be the widespread erroneous perception among the general public that Buddhists are solemn folk, unable to enjoy themselves. In addition it is regarded as an opportunity for Thai, Sri Lankan and British Buddhists to combine their efforts. While individuals from the ethnic groups may well develop friendships with British Buddhists there is a tendency for the groups to remain distinct and separate.

Respondents to the Amaravati lay people's survey, referred to in Chapter Six, were asked about the frequency of their contact with other people interested in Buddhism. Nine per cent said that contact was less than monthly and for eleven per cent contact was monthly. Sixty one per cent said that contact with other Buddhists was on a weekly basis and nineteen per cent had daily contact. British Buddhist lay people do not seem to form tightly knit groups among themselves. Observation of the Harnham supporters suggest a pattern of loosely structured

relationships within which strong friendships do arise, but there is a very low level of group solidarity. Some find this disappointing. One of the lay people active in initiating the foundation of the Harnham monastery told me:

> "I feel what is missing here is a close sense of spiritual community. There isn't that feeling around here, at least nothing comparable to the sense of spiritual community that you felt if, as I did, you grew up as part of a church. There you had a feeling of belonging to a community and of being responsible for one another. I miss it. It may be the nature of the Theravada practice that it is an inward thing and that the outward aspect isn't engendered."

<u>Harnham - a Branch Monastery</u>

Much of my time with lay people was spent in and around the Harnham monastery which is situated fourteen miles north east of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and had its origins in the enthusiasm of a small group who used to meet weekly for yoga and meditation at a house in the city. The core of the group numbered four, consisting of a university post-graduate student, now a lecturer, an artist, a social worker and another post-graduate, now warden of a nature reserve. All had previously travelled in Asia. One had been a pupil of Goenka in India and two others had spent time together in a Theravada monastery in Sri Lanka. Initially the group organised short meditation retreats led by John Coleman, employing methods received from his Burmese teacher, U Bha Kin. Eventually, they came to hear of the presence of Ajahn Sumedho and his

companions at Hampstead and invited the Ajahn to the north to lead retreats on a regular basis in hired accommodation. One of the four recalled:

> "When I met the Sangha it was so nice to be in the hands of people who first of all had a very pristine morality and had great clarity about them. I think it was the form that gave me confidence, the fact that there was something more than YOUR meditation to work on. It was taking you into some larger family of support. You could lose yourself in that and your little problems with meditation could be just part of what everybody was going through, because nobody finds meditation easy."

The group, which had recruited a few more members attracted to the retreats, decided to invite monks to reside in the north. By this time the Sangha had moved from Hampstead to Chithurst, with its busy atmosphere created by major rebuilding work and increased numbers of lay visitors. The idea was to find accommodation where monks could take time out from the activity at Chithurst in order to attend to their meditation practice and to lead occasional retreats for the lay supporters. An advertisement placed in the local newspaper - Retreat house wanted, will accept repair - brought one concrete response from a farmer at Harnham, who had to let one dilapidated five roomed cottage for £10 per week. Within ten months the group had rendered the cottage habitable and one senior monk and an anagarika arrived to take up residence in the Spring of 1981.

The monastery was formally opened by Ajahn Sumedho in June of the same year in the presence of about fifty lay

people, many of whom were visiting Harnham for the first time. Gradually the monastery attracted more supporters. A close friendship developed with the landlord, who is the monastery's nearest neighbour, resulting in a fifty year lease being granted to the Maha Bhavaka Trust, which was set up to administrate the monastery's financial affairs. The terms of the lease have been described as "generous."

As the premises were improved the complement of bhikkhus increased to three plus an anagarika. Beside their daily meetings for meditation and puja, the monks carried out much of the restoration work, fulfilled teaching engagements organised by the lay people and continued to live in strict accordance with the Vinaya discipline. Twice a month they continued to lead meditation practice and discussions on Buddhist teaching at the house in Newcastle where the yoga classes took place and which was large enough to accommodate a shrine room. In 1982 a Buddhist Society was established at the University of Newcastle where the monks became regular guests. Items about the monastery began to appear in local newspapers, magazines and on television, bringing more visitors.

A cottage adjoining the monastery was leased to accommodate lay visitors and in 1987 the Trust initiated further expansion through the Sanghamitta Project. This has involved the purchase of a small barn next to the original cottage and its conversion to living quarters for

bhikkhus, as well as the construction of a new Dhamma Hall currently in progress. The Dhamma Hall will be used for large gatherings which presently require the use of a marquee. Up to 300 people may attend the two major communal calendrical festivals of the year which are Wesak and Kaṭhina. The Wesak ceremony takes place on a weekend close to the full moon of May and marks the birth, Enlightenment and death of the Buddha. The Kaṭhina ceremony will be described in detail later.

The new Dhamma Hall will contain a consecrated sīmā boundary for bhikkhu ordinations and other formal acts of the Sangha. During the first two years contributions to the Sanghamitta Project have totalled over £33,000. In addition lay people have contributed skills and labour.

The Trust's Treasurer explained that the reason for providing the monks with new and separate accommodation was so that Harnham could function properly as a place where new monks could receive training.

> "Previously there was just one public room where everything went on and it was distracting for junior monks. They can't really live properly in that situation. They could only stay here for a short time because that amount of contact with lay people is distracting to their practice. You can imagine that with a young person becoming a monk there is a lot of doubt about whether this is the right thing to do, particularly when you are in close contact with a community of people who are themselves practising. Then you might start to wonder if you are doing the right thing. Perhaps you could disrobe and practice in this way. Thus there is the need for a monastic residence where a public centre is close, but where there is

> a vihara adjacent to it where no public things go on."

The level of support for the expansion suggests that the majority of lay people share the view that by definition a "monastery" is a place where monks can train in the Vinaya, whereas a place which caters extensively for lay people is a "centre". Conversationally Amaravati is referred to as "monastery", but its official title is Amaravati Buddhist Centre.

Monks and nuns of less than five years in robes do in fact spend little time outside the monasteries, and are therefore relatively secluded, although they do meet lay visitors at the monastery and make occasional visits to their families. The initial five years is recognised as a period of training under the tutelage of senior monks and is part of the induction into monastic life that begins with the two year anagarika postulancy.

From lay person to bhikkhu

The transition from lay person to the status of a bhikkhu who is considered to be sufficiently "pure" and "worthy" to teach Dhamma is, by this reckoning, a seven year undertaking, starting with the simple ceremony of offering candles, incense and flowers to the Abbot before the assembly of monks and requesting the Eight Precepts of the anagarika. The process then unfolds with the upasampadā ceremony (higher ordination) at which the new monk receives his Pali name, three saffron robes and alms bowl, emblem of his mendicancy.

Before entering the sīmā the applicant is examined by an ācariya (a senior monk) as to his suitability. The applicant must declare himself to be a male human, at least twenty years old, free from disease, free from economic and military obligations and having obtained the permission of his mother and father. In other words secular ties and obligations must be resolved and severed. Only when the ācariya is satisfied that all the requirements are met can the candidate approach the assembly of monks in the sīmā.

Ordination ceremonies are usually attended by crowds of lay people who remain firmly outside the sīmā. By crossing the sīmā boundary the applicant signals his transition from one cultural category to another, from that of layman to that of bhikkhu. Three times the candidate requests acceptance with the Pali formula:

> "Saṇghambhante upasampadamyāchāmi/Ullumpatu maṃ bhante saṇgho anukampaṃ upādāya."
>
> "Ven Sir, I beg for upasampadā. May the Sangha raise me up out of compassion."

The candidate is then examined again on the same questions as those put to him before he approached the Sangha. Being satisfied the ācarya pronounces the applicant fit, addressing the assembled bhikkhus and asking if the upasampadā is agreeable to "the Venerable Ones" and if they accept the appointed preceptor. The monks signal their agreement with silence. (On this last point I refer the reader to the discussion on the value

accorded to silence in Theravada Buddhism in Chapter Six.) The *ācariya* then pronounces the Sangha's judgement and the ordination itself is completed. The new bhikkhu prostrates himself three times and takes up his place within the assembly of bhikkhus with whom he now has communion (Pali - *samvassa*).

For the new monk the ordination ceremony is merely the beginning of another stage of advancement. He must now enter "the course of training" that will move him from the status of junior monk with its relative seclusion to that of the senior monk and his duties to teach Dhamma. After a total of ten years he may be granted permission from his teacher to act as an *upajjhāya*, that is one who may act at ordinations as a preceptor. Each stage takes him further away from his old life as a lay person in terms of temporality and in terms of his "purity". In Britain after ten years he will qualify to sit on the Maha Thera Council (Council of Elders) which oversees the activities of the Sangha here and maintains contact with Theras in Buddhist countries.

The initial five year period contained in the monastery is a period of socialisation and education into the norms and values of monastic life and therefore of great psychological importance for, as already touched upon, the hold on the bhikkhu life is recognised as being tenuous, at least in the early days, and not to be

disturbed by too much contact with reminders of the world from which the new monk has so recently "gone forth".

As an angarika the newly ordained monk spent two years at the interface between life as a monk and life as a lay person. Although technically a lay person, the anagarika is in actual fact in the position of being fully neither the one nor the other. In the juxtaposition of social space the anagarika occupies what Victor Turner terms the position of the "liminar" , from the Latin word *limen* meaning threshold [12].

Liminars are "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial." Frequently they are "initiands, or novices in passage from one sociocultural status to another" and are "ambiguous characters" [13]

In the anagarikas' handbook [14] the role is described as "homeless", but the anagarika ordination ceremony does not take place in the sīmā so they are also lay people. In certain respects the anagarikas are synonymous with the pious lay people in Theravada countries who dress in white and visit the monasteries where they observe the Eight Precepts. Usually they are elderly, retired people. In Britain, as was revealed in Chapter Three, the anagarika acts as a bridge between the laity and the monks, consequently the symbols of birth, death and rebirth such as seclusion and the receiving of a new name, which Turner associates with the liminal state,

are reserved for the higher ordination and the subsequent period. when the new bhikkhu dies to his old life.

Whatever his biological age, the new monk stands in relation to his preceptor as a son to his father. It is the preceptor who will measure the junior monk's progress and in consultation with other senior monks deem when it is appropriate for his teaching career to begin. There are some instances when accomplished monks are permitted to teach before the full five years training. When this has happened in the past it has been partly due to the shortage of monks available to teach in relation to the numbers of requests for visits and teaching.

The number of local Buddhist groups who ask to receive visits from monks is now around 30 and continuing to grow. Monks from Harnham pay regular visits to groups in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Doncaster, Leeds and Sheffield. Twice a month almsround (Pali - piṇḍapāta) takes place in Newcastle when the monks walk to various homes on invitation to collect food for the daily meal.

It is also becoming more usual for British lay people to require monks to perform ceremonies to mark births, marriages and deaths. These ceremonies fulfil the universal social functions that anthropologists ascribe to rites of passage as they are found in cultures all over the world: the new baby is formally and publicly integrated into the human collective, the married couple's reproductive status is socially sanctioned and the serious

disruption in social relations signified by the loss of a friend or relative through death is acknowledged and partly overcome [15]. The British Theravada ceremonies are generally short and simple compared to the intricacies that characterise similar occasions in rural Thailand [16], although some elements are borrowed and given new renderings.

Another factor in prompting some lay people to request the ceremonies for marriage and the naming of a child is to declare their Buddhist identity and to introduce non-Buddhist friends and relatives to the monasteries.

I shall take as an illustration of a life cycle rite a wedding blessing which I witnessed at Harnham monastery in the winter of 1987, the couple having previously undergone a civil marriage. Monks are prevented by the Vinaya from acting as marriage brokers and stress that the blessing is the shared acknowledgement of an event that has already taken place. For this reason they abandoned their initial practice in Britain of blessing couples who had not undergone a civil marriage and did not intend to do so.

During the first part of the morning of the ceremony that I attended the couple and a small number of guests gathered in the monastery kitchen to prepare the food which they had brought. This was achieved by 10-30 a.m. and the meal served to the three resident monks and two

anagarikas in the shrine room. The monks sat on the low platform beside the shrine (Pali - _āsana_). All the guests, excepting one elderly person, ate their meal seated on the floor facing the monks. The meal was taken in silence. After the remains were cleared away there was a break in the proceedings during which time more guests arrived to make a complement of about thirty in all.

The newly weds knelt before the shrine, the monks remained cross-legged upon the _āsana_ and the guests crammed together seated on cushions and mats on the floor. The Abbot of the monastery, Ajahn Pabhakaro, explained that although bhikkhus could not officiate at a marriage, and do not do so in Thailand, they are permitted to offer a blessing. The ceremony is designed to reflect the benefits that "wisdom and virtue" can bring to the couple's future together"

The couple made an offering of flowers, incense and candles which they placed before the shrine. Ajahn Pabhakaro explained to the company that the candles signified the "light of wisdom" and the flowers and incense the "fragrance of virtue." All human beings, he said, contained the potential to realise wisdom and virtue as represented by the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha for whom the offerings were intended. The couple then lit the candles and incense and requested the Three Refuges and Five Precepts by using the Pali formula. Those Buddhists

among the guests also asked for the Refuges and Precepts chanting together in Pali.

Ajahn Pabhakaro had before him a lighted candle stood in a dish of water. This, he said, brought to mind the elements of earth, air, fire and water which sustain and preserve life. A soft white thread was attached to the shrine and passed unbroken among the bhikkhus and all those present to symbolise the "bondedness" of all human beings. This was followed by the monks and anagarikas performing a long paritta chant in Pali. After the chanting the bride requested a talk (Pali - desanā) by once again using a Pali formula.

Ajahn Pabhakaro's talk stressed the common humanity of all people and the need to understand our common humanity through investigation of the inner life. When he concluded, the monks chanted more Pali verses and the assembly was sprinkled with the water in which the candle had been set. The company was instructed to break the thread and to bind small pieces to the wrist to carry away as reminders of the ceremony and the value of wisdom and virtue.

Elements of the ceremony borrowed from the Thai context included the use of the white thread which Tambiah describes as "being used to transfer and bind mystical power" [17] and which in the British context appears to be given a humanistic interpretation. In Britain the chanting of the Pali texts is less likely to be felt as

conferring religious merit upon the listeners. Most British Buddhists understand Pali insufficiently well to receive any doctrinal or ethical message communicated by the texts, and are consequently unlikely to be edified by the content. Nevertheless it is recognised that the chanting consists of Dhamma teaching as preserved in the ancient, sacred language. For this reason the chanting is revered by the lay people as the authentic sound of Buddhism.

The sharing of food, the taking of the Precepts and Refuges and the paritta chanting also feature at the annual communal Kathina festival, but on this occasion the emphasis is on offering a whole variety of requisites and donations of money to the Sangha. The focus of the ceremony is the offering of special cloth to a monk who has been chosen by his companions as especially worthy.

The Kaṭhina is the only monastic ceremony prescribed by the Vinaya Piṭaka "in which the laity are integrally involved" [18] and marks the culmination of the three months of vassa, also known as the Rains Retreat. In the Vinaya Piṭaka the Buddha ordains that monks should cease their wanderings for the three months of the monsoon season and remain together in groups of five or more. In Britain this period is observed, despite the lack of monsoon, and generally falls between July and October. For the most part normal comings and goings continue by virtue of complicated rules that permit a certain amount

of mobility during the Vassa. The Vinaya does not prohibit the monks from leaving the monastery altogether during Vassa, nor does it permit them to refuse an invitation to preach [19]. At present in Britain silent monastic retreats are held in January and February and at Harnham a retreat period is sometimes observed during September.

To return to the Kaṭhina Ceremony, the cloth having been received in a "pure and unsolicited fashion" on behalf of the Sangha, it is sewn by the monks into a robe before the following dawn The robe is offered by them to the bhikkhu who is appreciated for his guidance and example, usually the senior bhikkhu of the community.

The Kaṭhina ceremony is intended as a joyous occasion involving people from the entire Theravada community. The British Buddhists are enjoined to emulate the fulsome generosity of their Asian counterparts, who are persistently characterised as taking great pleasure in the act of giving. In an article written by a prominent and long standing British lay person, she quotes approvingly a remark made by a Thai woman - "Do you enjoy giving? Well, that's all there is to it. You may look for more but that is all there is - just give". [20]

Experiencing joy in giving is said to counter the grasping ego's inclination to attach to what is "me" and "mine" and provides an antidote to the apparent gross materialism of the present age. Giving inculcates

positive spiritual values in the individual and in society. By inspiring lay generosity the Sangha is interpreted as manifesting an opportunity "for selflessness to arise." Those who wish to subscribe to the theory of merit are not discouraged from doing so, but in Britain particular gestures of generosity or "open heartedness" are deemed by monks and lay people to be creatively beneficial acts in their own right. This is quite in line with orthodox Theravada theories about the processes that result in karmic consequences (Pali - kammaphala) whereby morally wholesome actions are followed by equally wholesome and spiritually rewarding outcomes. The complex of ideas about benefits that accrue through generosity is expressed by the following quotation from a published talk by Ajahn Sumedho..

> "A country like this is recognized as a benevolent and good country, but it has become too bureaucratic and too materialistic. Here in Europe we've become very demanding, always complaining and wanting things better, even though we don't need such a high standard. So as samanas [renunciants] we give the occasion for people to give what they can, and that has a good effect on us as well as society. When you open up the opportunity in a society for people to give to things they respect and love, people have a lot of happiness and joy out of that. If we have a tyrannical society where we we're constantly trying to squeeze everything out we can get so we have a depressed and miserable society. So in Britain now, we as monks and nuns make ourselves worthy of love and respect, people make offerings and more people experience the arising of faith. More people come and listen - they want to practise the Dhamma; they want to

> have the occasion to go forth and so it increases."

The finances of Amaravati and Chithurst are presently administered by the English Sangha Trust and the monasteries in Devon and Northumberland each have their own Trusts. The English Sangha Trust is a private limited company. At the time of writing the shareholders consisted of seven lay people and five bhikkhus. They elect a board of six directors; each director having to seek re-election every three years. Three of the directors are bhikkhus and the remainder are lay people. The board decides and oversees the implementation of policies concerning the disposition of funds which are managed on a day to day basis by the full-time company secretary and bursar of Amaravati, a salaried post currently occupied by a qualified lawyer.

Both the lay chairman of the Trust, George Sharp, and the President, Ajahn Sumedho, are hoping to see a restructuring of the Trust in a way that would bring the constitutional relationship between the Sangha and its lay supporters more into line with the Thai model, although difficulties in conforming to English law as it applies to charities, combined with resistance from some of the lay supporters may abort the attempts that are now under investigation. The problem centres around the fact that with the present constitution the lay people who are Trustees act as patrons of the Sangha, whereas in Thailand the committees attached to the monasteries, known as

kammakan wat, operate on the basis of stewardship. The difference being that stewards merely assist in the disposal of resources, whereas patrons may exert control over the disposal of resources.

Bunnag reports that the kammakan wat consists of several laymen, the Abbot and one or more junior bhikkhus [22]. The lay members handle the financial affairs of the monastery in order that the bhikkhus may be seen not to be in contact with money, but their control is minimised by the provision in Thai law that at least two monks must put their signatures to any cheque or other document relating to the affairs of their wat [23]. Bunnag describes how, at some monasteries, one lay member of the kammakan wat is known as the waiyawachakon or steward. He (for it is invariably a man) collects the food allowance granted to some of the bhikkhus at the monastery by the government Division of Religious Affairs, acts as an intermediary between householder and monk when the former wishes to present a sum of money to the latter, and purchases articles for the monks [24]. The kammakan wat "acts as a sanction against the wat's misuse of the money and goods presented by the laity." [25] However, according to the Vinaya rules it is the Sangha, in the sense of the cātuddisasaṅgha, the Sangha of the Four Quarters of the past, present and future, which owns the monastery and its property and has ultimate control.

In Britain there is no serious conflict between lay people and bhikkhus concerning the disposition of funds and property, all of which are controlled by the Trustees. But the possibility exists that should a dispute arise a group of lay people forming the majority of shareholders of the English Sangha Trust, as at present, could override the wishes of the Sangha. It may prove impossible to alter the situation because, in the opinion of the present bursar, English law is likely to assign the Sangha the characteristics of a self-perpetuating members club, which cannot therefore enter into contracts as an entity.

Opinion about the matter among lay people is divided. Chairman George Sharp, for example, supports change. Others are happy to continue with the status quo and fear the outgrowth of an ecclesiastical institution insufficiently answerable to the lay people. The vagaries of English law may well settle the matter in favour of the present system, but investigations and discussions are likely to go on for several years yet.

During the financial year 1988 - 89 the English Sangha Trusts's income rose by nearly half of the previous year's figures to exceed £200,000. The Trust's Annual Accounts show that nearly three hundred supporters gave regular monthly cash donations amounting to £3,000 per month. A total of £53,439 was represented by sums received on festival occasions and single sums of over £5,000 received from individuals. The considerable

amounts that are given in kind do not show up in the annual accounts, nor does the free supply of specialist expertise and labour received from lay people.

British Theravada lay people are on the whole well educated and occupy middle to higher income brackets. Below is a table showing the occupations of the lay people with whom I carried out either taped or protracted postal interviews. They form a random group who responded positively to my request for interviewees and it should be remembered that I also spoke informally to others who included students, unemployed people, those living entirely on state pensions and people in lower income brackets. However, it is safe to say that in general the main constituency of support for the British monasteries is not proletarian.

It has been my intention in this chapter to demonstrate that the laity in Britain, who are of course also the source of recruitment for the Sangha, are engaged in mutual negotiations with the Sangha to determine their inter-relationship in a predominantly non-Theravada Buddhist environment. Furthermore, the ethnographic detail suggests that the medium for those negotiations is the language of the fundamentalist and revivalist strand of the Theravada associated with the forest monasteries, a theme to be further advanced in the following chapter.

Occupations of Lay Interviewees

Woman 1	Educational psychologist
Man 1 and woman 2 (couple)	Smallholders
Man 2	Retired lecturer
Woman 3	Retired lecturer
Man 3	Engineer
Man 4	Retired civil servant
Man 5	University lecturer
Woman 4	Developmental psychologist
Woman 5	Teacher - E.F.L
Woman 6	Yoga teacher
Woman 7	Civil servant
Man 6	Sales representative
Woman 8	F.E. lecturer
Woman 9	Artist
Woman 10	Retired teacher
Woman 11	Secretary
Man 7	Unemployed

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CHAPTER EIGHT

BUDDHISM FOR WOMEN

As can be seen from the table at the end of the previous chapter, women figure strongly among the supporters of the Sangha in Britain. It would be very difficult to separate the contribution that women have made either through direct donations or through kind, but it is generally acknowledged by everyone involved that the proportion is high. A layman told me:

> "It is mainly due to the hard work of women that the Sangha survive as they do and it is only a matter of time before that recognition expresses itself through the monastic order"

Some would argue that "recognition" had already been expressed via the inauguration of the sīladhara form, that is the Ten Precept ordination for women. Others protest that in twentieth century Britain the just cause of women's rights can be served only if nuns have a completely equal standing alongside monks by being permitted the upasampadā ordination.

An appreciation of the controversy surrounding the issue of full ordination for women into the Theravada Sangha requires some grasp of historical background. The history of the women's order (bhikkhunī-saṅgha) is rather shadowy and confused and the causes for its decline and ultimate extinction indeterminate. Gombrich and Obeyesekere follow Gunawardana in suggesting that in Sri Lanka the bhikkhunī-saṅgha died out "probably in the late tenth century." [1] Falk maintains that in India the bhikkhunī order "virtually

disappeared from the historian's view" by the time of the Turkish invasions at the end of the twelfth century A.D. [2]. According to Kabilsingh, the bhikkhunī ordination never reached Thailand [3].

In the Pali cannon the bhikkhunī order is said to have been founded by the Buddha himself, although some stories portray him as reluctant to permit his aunt Mahāprajāpatī and her five hundred companions to renounce lay life and become the original Buddhist nuns. The story goes that he personally required the nuns to abide by a pāṭimokkha containing eight additional rules (Pali - garudhamma). The Buddha is additionally said to have stated that the presence of women in the Sangha meant that the true Dhamma instead of surviving as a teaching on earth for a thousand years would decline in half that time.

Barnes reports the sceptical response of modern researchers to the historicity of the canonical account suggesting that "its misogyny is uncharacteristic of the main body of early Buddhist scriptural writing." [4] Barnes demonstrates how "doctrinally, Buddhism has been egalitarian from its beginnings," and suggests that when the monks' and nuns' orders were founded,

> "...it was necessary to establish rules to regulate the daily lives of the ascetics; and in the heart of a religion which was free of any doctrines which fostered inequality, a patriarchal structure arose." [5]

The Eight special rules are summarised by Falk in the following order.

1. Any nun, no matter how long she has been in the order,

must treat any monk, even the most recent novice, as if he were her senior.

2. Nuns should not take up residence during the annual rainy retreat in any place where monks are not available to supervise them.

3. Monks should set the dates for bi-weekly assemblies of the nuns.

4. During the ceremony at the end of the rains retreat, when monks and nuns invite criticism from their own communities, the nuns must also invite criticism from the monks.

5. Monks must share in setting and supervising penalties for the nuns.

6. Monks must share in the ordination of nuns.

7. Nuns must never revile or abuse monks.

8. Nuns must not reprimand monks directly (although they could, and did, report one monk's offensive behaviour to another, who then might take the appropriate actions to correct it) [6].

Falk says the special rules simply reflect the socio-cultural position of women in North Indian society at the time of the Buddha and later and did not present an obstacle to the nuns' spiritual development [7]. She maintains that the presence of a nuns' order and its flowering over several centuries was a remarkable achievement in a society where female ascetic renunciation was against the normative role of women as childbearers. Normally a woman was subjugated to a male kinsman throughout her entire life-span.

"Thus the subordination of nuns to monks can probably best be traced historically to the early community's efforts to stay at least somewhat in line with the conventional practice of the day." [8]

Barnes tends to agree, but points out that ultimately accommodation to the norm cost the nuns dearly, because it meant that the monks were able to "keep women out of all positions of authority, in theory and in practice." [9] The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism presented new opportunities for women in the lands where it gained a footing. A bhikkhunī order was established in China in the fourth century A.D. [10] and continues to the present day, even in the People's Republic of China, and is flourishing in Taiwan. A nun's order also remains a feature of Tibetan Buddhism.

In the Theravada countries after the demise of the bhikkhunī-order the highest institutional religious status for women came to be that of the upāsikā, the pious laywoman, who keeps the Eight Precepts and makes an outward show by wearing white, there being no female equivalents to either the male novices (sāmaṇera) or monks. Gombrich and Obeyesekere have recorded how in Sri Lanka during the present century new developments have taken place [11]. Nowadays some women do shave their heads and wear saffron robes. A few older women follow the Ten Precepts and live with relatives as might the white clad upāsikās, while some live in nunneries [12]. The important point is that "they take the ten precepts on the same general principles as male novices." [13] Although they lack the higher ordination ceremony "they continue throughout

adult life to live just as if they were full fledged nuns." [14]

Within the saffron clad group the younger element is the most organised and differentiate themselves by adopting the English title "sister", a term not usually accorded the older women [15]. Other women take the Eight Precepts, which means that they do not renounce the handling of money, and live permanently in nunneries where "the eight-precept woman is to the ten precept-woman as a novice is to a monk." [16] In the Sinhala language the nuns are generically referred to by a variety of words all with the meaning "moral-precept-mother", or alternatively, by the traditional village term meaning "lay-disciple-mother" (Pali upāsikamma) more commonly employed of older women [17].

The new breed of nuns in Sri Lanka have been supported by the Protestant Buddhist elite and bourgeoisie who idealise the goal of personal Enlightenment (the arahat ideal) while at the same time wanting to "create a group intermediary between lay and monastic life." [18] There has been a special concern by Buddhist lay people to replace Christian nuns with Buddhist nuns in social work roles, particularly nursing. But the nuns have more affinity with the forest monks whose movement has been "revitalized in modern times." [19] Some nuns have set up vipassanā meditation centres and become meditation teachers. Lay people have thus come to respect the nuns for practicing according to the arahat ideal. In a study by Bloss, cited by Gombrich and Obeyesekere [20], ordinary people are recorded as viewing the nuns as sīlavanta

(pious). Temple monks on the other hand are often criticised for leading luxurious and wordly lives. They rejoin that the nuns should not try to be bhikkhunīs, and elements in the Sangha are disapproving or ambivalent in their attitude to the nuns. Gombrich and Obeyesekere tell us that :

> "According to Bloss, the nuns in his sample (who tend to be educated) do not want to reinstitute the older bhikkhunī order, since by the Vinaya rules this would put them under the formal authority, and domination of monks. Others especially the smaller, little-known and little-educated groups, have taken over the monk's derogatory views and see themselves as inferior to the monks. It is very likely that education and social class determine which of these attitudes is assumed." [21]

Sister Khema, a nun of German origin, has established a retreat centre in Sri Lanka known as Parappuduva,or Nuns' Island. It is located at Dodanaduva, a place made famous earlier this century as a forest hermitage for German and other foreign monks and established by Nyanatiloka (Anton Gueth). Having practised as a Ten Precept nun since 1979 Sister Khema received the sāmaṇera ordination followed nine days later by higher ordination as a bhikkhunī in separate ceremonies at Hsi Lai Temple, Hacienda Heights, near Los Angeles, California during December 1988.

I received a written account of the ordination from one of the participants, Martha Sentnor. The following is an extract.

> "Fifty foreign nuns became bhikkhunīs and represented all three traditions of Theravada,Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. The western nuns came from the U.S.A., France, Germany, Spain, Canada and Australia. We (the Theravadins) had five Sri Lankan nuns, Ayya Khema and myself also ordained. So now there

are twelve bhikkhunīs who follow the Theravada teachings in the world.

"Actually there is no such entity as a Mahāyāna bhikkhunī or even a Mahāyāna Sangha. There are simply monks and nuns who ordain into pre-Mahāyāna Vinaya tradition, and practice the Theravada sutras, Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna Sutras.

"We had a very gruelling and careful preparation, training fourteen to sixteen hours a day. The bhikkhunī-vinaya teachers were particularly impressive...The Grand Master, Ven Hsing Yun, feels that there should be equality between monks and nuns. One has the option to observe the Eight Garudhammas, or not...

"All the ceremonies were ancient Vinaya forms for women, with a duly consecrated simā. We had speakers from the Theravada tradition, including Ven. Dr. Ratanasara and Ven. Piyananda Thera of the large Sri Lankan temple in Los Angeles."

If the observation of the garudhammas becomes optional then objections that the bhikkhuni ordination places women in a position of dependence on the monks may be overcome. There is nothing in Theravada canon law to prevent women from undertaking the upsampadā ordination and subsequently practising within the Theravada tradition. The obstacle lies in widespread prejudice in Sri Lanka and Thailand against the Mahayana lineages which practice slight modification to the Theravada pātimokkha, and are conceived as impure and inauthentic. In America the attitude of expatriate Sri Lankan monks is permissive, even with respect to the optional undertaking of the garudhammas. When twenty Sri Lankan monks living in the U.S.A. were polled to elicit their consent for the ordinations described above only one dissented [22]. Some

Thai monks have also been present at the Hsi Lai Temple ordinations.

In Thailand the "nuns' movement" has not developed in any way comparable to the situation that Gombrich and Obeyesekere have described for Sri Lanka There is a Thai version of the upāsikā, known either as ji or mae chi, who shave the head, wear white and observe the Five Precepts of the lay person, while living either in a wat (temple) or at home with relatives. Kabilsingh [23] reports a survey undertaken in 1981 showing there to be "not more than 20,000 jis in Thailand." Of these only forty per cent have completed secondary school. Most are either single, divorced or separated from their husbands and were previously engaged in agricultural work. Kabilsingh claims that the majority of the women became jis primarily out of the wish "to cut themselves off from the ties of wordly lives." Material support is usually provided by the relatives and sometimes jis live in dire poverty. Their status in Thai society is low. Kabilsingh explains:

> "First, jis are more lower class than middle class. They are primarily from families of farmers, with very low educational background. They are not able to look beyond their own sphere of existence and are generally not aware of their own problems. They are religiously conservative, understanding nirvana, for example, as personal spiritual salvation. Therefore they tend to sever themselves from any work which might be considered worldly. Jis are generally looked down upon by society, and by the monks. They do not have a proper religious status and are accepted neither by the monks nor the laity. Becoming a ji is often seen as the resort of those who have failed in worldy lives. More degrading is the fact that some elderly jis

who have no financial support have to beg for their living in public." [24]

In the slightly disapproving tone of her remark about jis rejecting "wordly work" Kabilsingh, herself a devout Buddhist, seems to echo the Sri Lankan Buddhist elites' wish that female Buddhist religious should engage in compassionate works. She concludes that the jis do not represent "a satisfactory Buddhist institution in which a respectable Thai woman might pursue a religious life." [25] Kabilsingh also suggests that any moves to inaugurate the bhikkhunī-saṅgha in Thailand would meet considerable resistance from the monks, while acknowledging that among some of the younger generation of monks, particularly those who act as secretaries to the Theras and stand to inherit that mantle, there is a change of attitude so that the acceptance of the bhikkhunī-saṅgha is, in her opinion, "foreseeable." [26]

Chatsumarn Kabilsingh's mother, Vorami Kabilsingh, was ordained as a bhikkhunī in Taiwan in 1971. She resides at her own temple south of Bangkok. In 1989 Bhikkhunī Martha Dharmapali (Martha Sentnor) recorded a meeting with Vorami who trains Eight Precept nuns clad in white [27]. On Sundays lay supporters attend the temple to hear Vorami preach. She and her novices are involved in social work, particularly relief for the poor. Martha Dharmapali writes that Vorami's return to Thailand from Taiwan was followed by "years of harassment by the provincial government and certain individuals." However at the time of the visit Vorami had won the respect of many supporters who held her in "high esteem." [28]

At Ajahn Chah's forest monasteries women are permitted to take up residence as upāsikā. An English woman and supporter of Harnham monastery told me of her time at Wat Pah Nanachat, The International Monastery.

> "I went there for a couple of days and ended up shaving my head. The rules are that you have to shave your head if you stay there for longer than a certain period. You had to wear a black sarong and a white blouse and a white sheet and take the precepts. There were absurdities there. You had to kneel every time you spoke to a monk, and women were very much second class citizens and had to sit at the back and generally pretend not to be noticed. I was just so amazed at being in this entirely new cultural setting that I thought I had better go along with the rules. They didn't actually make me feel any worse about myself as a woman. I would occasionally feel irritated that we had to go through this charade because of the cultural pattern.
>
> "We went to visit Ajahn Chah. I went with a couple of village women and when you were with the village women you had to be very meticulous and do everything in the right way. Even if you caught so much as a glimpse of an orange robe you had to dive onto the ground. I remember thinking - Oh! if my friends could see me now - because they were all desperately feminist and so was I at the time, but felt - when in Rome etc. It was a bit like being an intruder in a boys' club and you were seeing what was going on."

Ultimately, my informant felt that her time at the monastery had been a "rewarding period" and produced a beneficial effect on her meditation practice. On returning to England she contemplated becoming an anagarika in the British Sangha, but rejected the idea for a number of reasons. Among them was

> "...the feeling that I couldn't see myself becoming part of something that was so blatantly chauvinist. However you try and

> look at the other side of it and say, well the nuns are coming up and flourishing."

The British order of Tens Precept nuns known as sīladhara (one who nurtures virtue), originated when Patricia Stoll, a regular supporter of the monks during the Hampstead period, visited Ajahn Chah in Thailand and received permission from him to reside at Chithurst as an Eight Precept anagarikā. Prior to this there were only male anagarikas. She gave up her flat and her job at a homeopathic hospital and moved to Chithurst to become known as Sister Rocana. Soon she was joined by three other younger women and in September of the same year a nearby cottage was purchased by the English Sangha Trust to accommodate the women.

Five years later the four women took the Ten Precept ordination and thereby became mendicants so their ordination ceremony was termed a pabbajjā (a Going Forth). The first pabbajjā ordination took place at Chithurst on the same day as the bhikkhu ordination (upasampadā). Subsequently it was held separately as some Theras in Thailand disapproved of the two kinds of ordination taking place together. They feared that British lay people might therefore fail to distinguish between the two.

There was to be no shortage of women wishing to take up ordination and by 1987 the sīladhara numbered twelve with four anagarikās. At that time nine lived at Amaravati in the two nuns' viharas and three in the cottage at Chithurst. During the same period Amaravati and Chithurst jointly accommodated twenty seven bhikkhus and six anagarikas.

Interestingly many of the women who have become nuns are women who in lay life enjoyed a high degree of economic independence, or possessed the educational or vocational training to enable them to do so. One nun renounced a personal income, others that I have talked to included a former nurse, diplomatic secretary, horticulturist, choreographer, physiotherapist and musician.

The nuns wear chocolate brown robes and observe a rule based on a framework provided by the Ten Precepts. The details of the elaborated rule have altered slightly over the years and it is still spoken of as being in the process of development. As it currently exists, the rule stresses the dependence (Pali - nissaya) of the nuns upon the bhikkhu-sangha. A document entitled Going Forth: A Training for Theravada Nuns was compiled by a senior monk in consultation with other monks and with the nuns.

According to the Preface the pabbajjā ordination for nuns is essentially the same as that for sāmaṇeras (the traditional Theravada novitiate), with the addition of the request for dependence. We read in the Preface:

> "There is the possibility of referring to Chinese Bhikkhunis, although that tradition has developed conventions and procedures not found in the Pali Bhikkuni Vinaya. As pabbajjā does not require the double ordination (by bhikkhus and bhikkhunis) it is still legally valid. This is important, both for the concord of the Sangha, and for maintaining the proper respect for the unifying influence of the Vinaya."

The British nuns, like some of the Sri Lankan nuns previously described, take on the conventions traditionally

associated with a novice (*sāmaṇera*). The anagarikas are a new category of novices and part of the responsibility for their training falls to the senior nuns. However, because the tradition associates *sāmaṇera* ordination with the young and immature learner the British Sangha has decided that the nun's training should be "more developed" than that of the *sāmaṇera/sāmaṇerī* and...

> "...that it should be conducted with the understanding that she is a mature woman (not a little boy), that she may remain in that status for the rest of her monastic career, and will be looked upon as a teacher capable of teaching lay people and junior nuns." [29]

As a consequence some of the "principles" derived from the *bhikkhunī-vinaya* have been imported into the nun's rule. Issues to do with admitting new members of the order, assigning penalties for serious transgressions, and certain other legal procedures are conducted under the auspices of the bhikkhu-sangha and in the presence of the *sīladhara*. The stated purpose is to achieve "legal validity and common consent." Matters of personal discipline are dealt with by the nuns themselves through "understanding and reflection on the principles embodied in the Ten Precepts." [29]

The arrangement described above is justified on the grounds that the Buddha recognised the need "for even mature *upasampadā* women (bhikkhunīs) to receive guidance and support from the more experienced and less vulnerable order of bhikkhus," [30] an oblique reference to the Eight Garudhammas. Thus the rule of the *sīladhara* echoes the *bhikkhunī-vinaya* by requiring that the *pabbajjā* ceremony take

place in the presence of a group of at least four bhikkhus. The nuns are required to have a senior monk (Thera) as preceptor (upajjhāya). The rationale provided in the training manual is that the measure prevents

> "...incapable candidates from being admitted by unauthorised teachers - a state of affairs that would be disastrous for concord and correct observation."

The upajjhāya subsequently acts as ācariya, or teacher, to the nuns, although he may appoint another senior bhikkhu to undertake his task providing he has the consent of the other monks within the monastery. On the fortnightly uposatha days the nuns recite their Rules of Training and take the Ten Precepts from the ācariya,who also gives an exhortation. The latter may take place in front of bhikkhus and lay people. The nuns may recite their precepts collectively without the presence of an ācariya and nuns may live apart from an ācariya for no longer than seven uposathas without inviting a visit. If no ācariya is available a competent experienced nun of at least ten vassas should be appointed by the bhikkhu-saṅgha as an ācari for nuns for that time. Nuns may be sent to live in pairs in viharas apart from bhikkhus for part of the year, but must spend the three months of the Rains Retreat (vassa) in communion (Pali - samvassa) with monks. The reason for the samvassa is given as preventing the Sangha from becoming "polarised into male and female." [31]

The first five of the Nun's Ten Precepts involve adhering to a more strict interpretation of the lay person's

Five Precepts, so, for example, the Precept relating to ethical sexual behaviour is rendered to refrain from "unspiritual" behaviour, which actually means refraining from all sexual activity including masturbation, an offence requiring confession and correction. The nun should avoid being alone in the presence of a layman or an anagarika, excluding her father or her brother. The precept to refrain from taking intoxicants or drugs which cause heedlessness is extended to accepting even intoxicants for use in cooking.

Through the additional five precepts the nun refrains from eating after noon. The nuns are not encouraged to cook food, but may be permitted to do so when other assistance is scarce and the food is to be consumed by the monastic community. It is otherwise an offence for a nun to cook food for her own consumption. The Seventh Precept refers to refraining from entertainments, which for the nun includes sports other than Yoga and Tai'Chi which are permitted providing there are no onlookers. Reading matter is regulated by this Precept and romantic novels and thrillers are considered unsuitable. The Eighth Precept forbids wearing garlands for beautification. The head hair is not to be allowed to grow more than two inches or for longer than a period of two months. Mirrors are to be used only to assist shaving the head. The Ninth Precept excludes the use of high luxurious beds and prescribes a wooden plank bed raised not more than eight inches above the ground. The Tenth Precept is to refrain from accepting gold or silver meaning all cash currency and cheques. This rule is slightly

modified if the nun is assisting a bhikkhu to avoid offending his discipline. In extreme situations the nun is therefore permitted to use money on behalf of a bhikkhu, for example to make a telephone call in an emergency or to buy a ticket for travel.

In their mode of conduct towards monks nuns are to try to keep a respectful physical distance apart and to defer to bhikkhus in doorways, corridors and stairs. When approaching a seated monk, a nun should "walk" on her knees. When conversing with a monk a nun is supposed to sit in a prescribed "polite posture" with hands held in añjali. When visiting lay people, and sitting in a chair, the nuns are to refrain from crossing their legs over the knee because it is a posture "which emphasises the legs and hips." [32] Nuns should not take seats higher than a bhikkhu without proper cause such as illness.

In these minor rules of etiquette the subordinate position of nuns in relation to monks is made persistently visible to the lay people. And for some, particularly lay women, they provoke considerable heart searching and concern. One particular convention relating to the monks' etiquette is also a matter for debate. The custom in question requires that when receiving an article to be consumed, for example a cup of tea, from a woman a bhikkhu should set down a small cloth for it to be placed upon rather than accept it directly into his hands. The use of the "offering cloth" is specific to the Thai tradition and is not practiced in Sri Lanka, nor is it prescribed by the Vinaya. In Britain its use has

proved contentious. Privately many monks disdain it. On informal occasions, particularly on visits outside the monastery, the "offering cloth" is frequently abjured, but ideally such behaviour is incorrect and the practice has not been officially abandoned by a pronouncement from the Council of British Maha Theras. A senior monk explained to me that the use of the cloth does not imply that women emanate contamination, but acts as a reminder of the cautious and respectful distance that must be maintained between a bhikkhu and all women.

The use of the "offering cloth" is greatly disliked by some lay women while others view it with good humour, believing it to be so visibly anachronistic in the context of British culture as to ensure its gradual demise.

The nuns, and some lay women, give a number of reasons for not objecting to the rules which place nuns in dependence on the bhikkhu-saṅgha and for accepting the rules which apply to women and not to men, for example the rule which prevents a woman having a totally private conversation with a bhikkhu, even if he is her teacher. In this last example the bhikkhu would be chaperoned by another monk or anagarika. The first reason appeals to the spiritual equality present in Buddhist doctrine and referred to earlier in this discussion. One lay woman said:

> "All conditions are right for practice. Though ordination is an outward symbol, women can have an inner ordination which is just as valuable. Ultimate truth has nothing to do with roles. Maybe men are spiritually handicapped by their need to dominate.

> Insofar as Buddhism is not based on dualism, it does provide a more equal role for women."

The nuns maintain that spiritually they have the same opportunity to practice the Holy Life as do the monks, and that in the final analysis this is what really matters. It is sometimes implied that to accept a humble position is advantageous to religious practice and as a training in abandoning the demands of egoism it has a positive advantage. For those nuns who have past experience in the Thai monasteries, the situation in Britain is by contrast so much of an improvement as to mitigate cause for complaint. A nun explained:

> " In the Thai monastery I was usually in the kitchen cooking and it would be the same even if I stayed there for twenty years. I would never get the chance to give a talk, while very young monks could teach. Here senior nuns have begun to give talks. Here gradually monks and nuns are coming to the same condition."

The belief that as the nuns' order "matures" and produces teachers it will come to exist on fully equal terms with the bhikkhu-saṅgha sustains those who are not in a hurry for change. That several senior nuns have for the past few years successfully led a number of retreats for lay people is seen as encouraging support for such a view. Alternatively, there is a body of opinion suggesting that the inequality of status between monks and nuns is something to be dealt with during the formative phase of the Sangha's presence in Britain. There is concern that a laissez faire approach may permit asymmetry based on gender to harden into an deeply embedded institutional feature. From this perspective it is

preferable to alter the balance at this stage of the Theravada's induction into Western culture, because it is felt that things as they stand merely reflect and compound the disadvantages faced by women in British society at large. The spiritual egalitarianism of Buddhist doctrine as opposed to practice is, in this form of the argument, called upon as a fundamental challenge to all sexual inequality. The view that humility acts as an aid to ridding oneself of attachment to worldly forms is then roundly rejected as in the following quotation from an interview with a lay woman:

> "This is a position you can take; but it is about the only thing you can do. I don't think it is necessarily right. It is like saying well, I have a broken leg and can't walk, but I'll have to accept it and work with it. But that isn't a reason for having a broken leg in the first place."

The appeal to the doctrinal concept that gender is yet another of life's fleeting conditions and ultimately "not-self" is sometimes employed as a counter against excessive pre-occupation with issues relating to gender and status. It is said by the monks that by living according to Dhamma principles harmony can and will be accomplished despite outward conditions [33]. But in reply concern is expressed about the accessibility of Dhamma teaching. The lay woman mentioned earlier, who had spent time at Wat Pah Nanachat, and continues to support the Sangha in Britain said:

> "I am sure the attitude to women does prevent a lot of women from becoming involved. It makes me question my involvement quite seriously from time to time. Sometimes a when you talk to the monks they can make you feel quite stupid about feeling that way and that you have to transcend gender identity.

> But we have to live in the world. I am still a woman and I have to go along with their rules. It is very easy for the oppressors to say that it doesn't really matter, because they don't know what it feels like to be oppressed".

The strong language in which the above quotation is couched evokes the mood, close to anguish, of a lay woman whom I met two years ago. As I do not have her opinion about wishing to be identified, I shall call her Helen, although that is not her real name. Helen was a single independent woman who had worked as a shepherd and as a builder running her own business. She held women to be in very respect equally competent and worthy when compared to men and was particularly sensitive and alert to any implication asserting the contrary. For Helen a truly humane society could not permit one sector to have disproportionate power over another by virtue of gender. In our own society that meant for her that a woman should not collaborate with patriarchal power structures that deny women equal opportunities. Hence her independence and drive to acquire skills and practice trades previously considered as predominantly masculine.

Helen had been a Buddhist for several years prior to our meeting and spent long periods staying at one of the monasteries helping with building work. She also enjoyed a period working at the FWBO's women's retreat centre where her feminist sensibilities were less troubled, but the ascetic appeal of the monastery drew her back to the Theravada. She told me that to go onto another path having spent so much time on the Theravada would be an evasion, "a turning my back on a difficulty that needs to be resolved."

Helen's "difficulty" was the anger she felt about the "sexism" that was, in her view, an inexorable consequence of the hierarchical positioning of men above women in the monastic Sangha. Yet Helen felt with equal intensity the aspiration to be ultimately "free" in the sense of not wanting to be "bound by one's emotions and habits." Through her meditation practice and study she had accepted the diagnosis of the human condition made by the Buddha and the cure he prescribed as a means to liberation. The anger prompted by what she experienced as male chauvinism in the Sangha became, in the light of Buddha-Dhamma, merely another manifestation of that furnace of craving and aversion that is fuelled by its own lure. This realisation did not justify the slights to women that she saw as being embedded in the institutional form of the Sangha, but it did necessarily influence her response. To turn away out of frustration did not provide her with a viable solution, rather she chose "to dive into the anger" and to test the teaching by becoming an anagarika.

What arises from considering these accounts of women's experiences are two inextricably linked issues. The first one deals with the question of the compatibility of Theravada Buddhist doctrine with feminist perspectives and the second with the precise nature of the attraction that Buddhism holds for women. To begin with one can return to Barnes' assertion that doctrinally Buddhism is egalitarian. Certainly the women that I met see Buddhist doctrine in this way and wish to take advantage of the fact that at the "theological" level

here is a religion with a soteriology that makes no distinction on account of gender. Potentially the doctrine offers women no more and no less than men, and as such compares very favourably beside other major religions.

One way of dealing with the second issue might be to turn it on its head and ask why a predominantly male institution such as the Sangha appears so dependent on the support of women who, in Thailand, rise each morning early to prepare cooked food in readiness for the monks' alms round. In India this nurturing role is adopted by the Digambar Jain women in respect of the radically ascetic munis, the wandering "sky-clad" Jain monks of India. Among the Jains religious fervour is especially visible in the act of ahardan, giving food to monks, which is the speciality of women as cooks [34].

Helen speculated that some British Theravadin women thought of the monks as dependent men requiring food and assistance; a kind of knee-jerk reaction on the part of women enculturated into accepting nurturing roles. When she first put this theory to me I dismissed it as rather too rough and ready for a social anthropologist, so Helen asked me what my reaction had been when I first encountered the monks. I said that I had thought them to be brave souls indeed if they were prepared to be mendicants and rely on the generosity of others for their subsistence. I felt rather concerned that they might not get enough to eat and never went to the monastery without taking food. With a smile Helen suggested that I had proved her point.

Certainly I encountered women who spoke about looking after monks in very motherly terms, especially around the Harnham monastery where there were no nuns. Nevertheless, the same woman who spoke about the need to "keep the boys fed" also withdrew the offer of a large and comfortable caravan to provide extra accommodation at the monastery when her condition that it be used by nuns was not met. Lay women are undoubtedly prepared to serve the Theravada Sangha, but in so doing they expect, on the whole, to influence the orientation of the Sangha towards meeting the needs of women and to urge it in the direction of the egalitarianism promised by the doctrine. They regard the formation of the nuns' order as a vital step.

All the lay people speak highly of the nuns. Indeed my observations led me to the conclusion that the whole enterprise of establishing a monastic Sangha in Britain would, in all likelihood, have floundered without the inception of the sīladhara. From the outset women contributed a significant portion of the necessary material and moral support. The women supporters that I have met are generally independent minded and articulate people who care about equal opportunities for women. It is improbable that women of this kind would be motivated to support an institution that forbade women active involvement.

Certain laymen also remain uneasy about the current discrepancies. Liberal consciences among men might well have prevented some from underwriting an all male spiritual fraternity and hindered the Sangha's expansion. On the

whole, lay people, while not uncritical, do accept the present constitution of the Sangha as a necessary stage in its transition to the West. Negotiations between the Sangha and lay people rest on an understanding that the British Sangha is delicately positioned between two cultural contexts, the British and the Thai. The question of the status of women fully illustrates this position. The Sangha faces the need to accommodate Western feminist perspectives by admitting women, yet it is constrained from innovating too radically in this area, as with others, for the sake of maintaining good relations with Thai supporters and with the Thai ecclesiastical authorities.

The relevance of the concept of "lineage" in authenticating the British Sangha's orthopraxy is discussed in Chapter Three. Lineage is "more than history" and "to turn to Dhamma is to be part of the lineage of practice that we call Sangha." [35] The lineage of the British Sangha stems from Ajahn Chah, honoured in Thailand as an "arahat", a saintly monk.[36]

Sources of Authority

Ajahn Chah's achievements as a forest saint, and founder of monasteries imbues him with charismatic authority of a different kind ascribed to Sangharakshita in Chapter Four. In that instance the charismatic authority vested in Sangharakshita by his followers is entirely dependent upon his personal attributes and his role as founder of the WBO. The WBO has only a tentative, inchoate rational legal

structure. Authority ultimately rests with Sangharakshita, and is diffused through his aides. In the case of the forest saints personal charisma arises out of the pursuit of a codified discipline. A situation which, in Tambiah's opinion,

> "...does not fully confirm the extreme comparison and antithesis that Max Weber drew between the charisma incorporated and distributed in bureaucratic organization of offices and the quintessential expression of charisma as a personal exuberance intransigent towards discipline." [37]

In Theravada Buddhism "the meditation master's personal qualifications are achieved by relating his effort to an institutionalized and formalised vocation." [38] Nevertheless, the forest saint is able to employ "flexibilities and latitudes" in the way he acts, because he possesses personal authority. The forest saints in the remote locations tend to challenge the ecclesiastical and political establishments with their power base in Bangkok. Referring particularly to the example of Ajahn Chah, Tambiah opines that the network of branch monasteries and subsidiary centres

> "...can constitute, if systematically expanded, a formidable system of charismatic influence and presence that is so different from the established ecclesiastical system or the political authority with its patrimonial bureaucratic attitudes and weaknesses." [39]

In Britain Ajahn Sumedho and his monks are heirs to the charismatic authority of their forest lineage and to the accompanying attitude that extols the spirit over the letter of the Vinaya and its commentaries. Compassionate liberality

may be exercised within the bounds of the *pāṭimokkha*, thus Ajahn Chah's dispensation concerning the traditions surrounding the monks's apparel. Thai bhikkhus go barefoot (though this is not a requisite of the *pāṭimokkha*). In Britain he urged his monks to wear socks and sandals, and later they took to wearing woolly hats in winter, and long sleeve jumpers. Heavy cloth was used for the outer robe (Pali - *saṅghati*) causing a slight change in the way it is draped. Later a jacket was designed to be worn under the robes. It was decided that the monks should wear the jacket summer and winter, because it was ascertained that in England people ordained into religious organisations have generally adopted modest garments which cover from head to foot. The traditional bhikkhu robe which leaves the right arm and shoulder bare was deemed likely to be associated with "immodesty and low class." [40]

The combination of charismatic authority, providing for flexibility and adaptability, plus strict adherence to the ultimate value of the Vinaya has been well matched to produce reliance and stability within the uneasy period of the Sangha's initial assimilation into Western culture. It has allowed for a major innovation in the case of the establishment of the nuns' order, but has also determined the cautious manner in which that innovation has been carried out.

A similar pattern was observed by Suzanne Campbell Jones, and identified as a positive factor in the success of a Franciscan order of nuns in adjusting to the changing

circumstances during the late 1960s, following on from Vatican II [41]. Campbell Jones also studied a teaching order of nuns founded by an Augustinian canon during the nineteenth century. The teaching order "earned the reputation of being amongst the most progressive Catholics in England." [42] Under the impetus of Vatican II the teaching order "radically altered their lifestyle, economic base, governmental structure and even their form of religious belief." The Franciscan, in contrast, continued to preserve their traditions, except for minor alterations in custom.

> "They remain today in full religious habit, in silence, in enclosure. Although they had felt all the pressure for change both from society and from the Church which their teaching sisters had experienced, they resisted those pressures and are still successfully drawing candidates for the religious life, thriving as a congregation, and carrying on their valuable caring work." [43]

Campbell-Jones goes on to demonstrate how the continuity displayed by the Franciscans depended on a high degree of flexibility which underlay their apparent conservatism. Neither St Francis, whose Rule the nuns' congregation followed, or the founder, Mother Mary Francis, were "conventional personalities" and were embued by their followers with charismatic authority.

At the retirement of the foundress, the chosen successor was Mother Mary Francis' first novice and "one of the original charismatic band, singled out for succession from the earliest days." She achieved a style of leadership "based as much on charisma as on constitutional right." [44] But her charisma has, in similar ways to that of St Francis

and the Mother Foundress, been channelled into the office of Superior General and into "the religious goals of the organization." In this way says Campbell Jones:

> "The potentially disruptive nature of charisma is controlled, but its innovative possibilities enable the congregation to achieve a flexibility and mobility characteristic of the early friars and well attuned to the twentieth century." [45]

The analogy with the British Forest Sangha is striking. In the case of the Sangha plasticity and adaptability have been essential in order to achieve a fit with at least some of the conceptual and operational norms of British culture. Establishing the sīladhara order was a response to pressures to adjust to a society that increasingly expects egalitarianism with regard to gender. Women could not be reasonably or practically denied a place in the Sangha.

Fortunately, the experiments in Sri Lanka supplied a precedent in the Theravada world. It is interesting to recall that according to Gombrich and Obeyesekere there is, in Sri Lanka, a link between the nuns' movement and the forest hermitage revival in their joint focus on meditation and the arahat ideal. Privately many members of the British Sangha hope that by maintaining their association with Thai Buddhists the sīladhara ordination may eventually be taken up as part of the small, but growing movement to upgrade women's religious status in Thailand.

Thus far the British Sangha appear to have maintained a balance between creative, new developments facilitated through the vitality inherent in systems dependent upon

charismatic authority, and the fixed and conservative influence of the Vinaya Piṭaka, blue print of the arahat path. In the Theravadin example, the antithesis between personal charismatic and legal authority postulated by Weber is transformed into a synthesis. In the transitional stage between one cultural setting and another this synthesis equips the Theravada Sangha with the potential for resilience and continuity without compromising its ability to adjust to new conditions. As forest monks most markedly display these potentialities they may prove to be the ideal transmitters of Theravada Buddhism across cultures, particularly when they are Western forest monks making a return journey.

Women in the FWBO

My own first encounter with the FWBO was in the Norwich area during the mid 1970s when it had a reputation as being somewhat exclusively a young men's organisation. When I returned to Norwich in 1988, and spent some time carrying out interviews with people in and around the Norwich Buddhist Centre, I found a wide mix of people in terms of age and gender. One informant agreed that twelve years previously people might have been forgiven for characterising the Centre as consisting of people in their twenties and early thirties, but personnel within the Movement had themselves grown older and there had been a deliberate effort to appeal to a wider spectrum of people.

I undertook taped interviews with twelve people currently connected with the Norwich Centre. Of these four

were women. Due to problems in scheduling I was unable to tape interviews with another two women who had volunteered to help with the research, although I did speak to them informally. Of the total of my Norwich interviewees two were over fifty years old and one woman was aged seventy.

At a beginners' meditation class that I attended the balance between numbers of men and numbers of women appeared to be even and the age range was broadly differentiated. I was told that a group of around a dozen women in Norwich edit and produce Mitrata, a study journal for Mitras based on extracts from past lectures given by Sangharakshita. All this seemed to confirm my informants contention that changes were taking place in the general composition of the FWBO in Norwich.

For the same year, 1988, I was informed that requests for ordination into the WBO stood at 110 men and 80 women. However, if all these people eventually proceed to ordination the ratio of men to women in the WBO will remain unevenly balanced towards men for some time to come, as the numbers of Order members in Britain in 1990 stood at 176 men and 54 women. However, because the figure of 80 women requesting ordination is proportionally greater than it has been in the past there was a positive reaction among many of the people with whom I talked. They believe that with regard to women the numbers have taken an upturn, and that proportions of men to women in the Order will even out in the near future. Concern was expressed by the overall Mitra Convener that the current absence of women Order members at the Brighton,

Manchester and Bristol centres meant women Mitras were not receiving sufficient support and encouragement from members of their own gender.

The November 1989 issue of Golden Drum, the FWBO magazine, was given over to the question of Buddhism and women, and there are some signs that what is known as the "women's wing" of the Movement is gaining strength.

Punyamala is a 35 year old woman Order Member , or Dharmacarini, who lives in an attractive, spacious house in Norwich with her husband, also an Order Member, and her infant son. Also living in the house is another male Order Member and family friend. Punyamala worked for some years as a child psychologist and has in the past been actively involved with feminist causes. She began attending the Norwich Buddhist Centre in 1980, two or three years after abandoning church going, and was ordained into the WBO in 1986; a day she describes as the most significant in her life.

Punyamala maintains that during her six years in the Movement conditions for women have improved. She believes that the single sex events and institutions within the FWBO will continue to benefit both men and women, but feels that family life should be valued:

> "As the movement gets bigger, as there are more families, then the involvements in bringing up children and educating them will happen. It may take years, but I think that the FWBO has a structure that will prevent it from becoming static. When I started I picked up a strong anti-family feeling, and that has changed, as has the very strong separation between men and women. At times I felt that I

> was not even meant to be talking to a man because it was not the right thing to do. But it is up to individuals to decide what they need and then create the situation for it to happen. The Movement is expanding, taking more and more different sorts of people. It has to do that otherwise it will die."

Punyamala believes that "if you are a woman there is no better place to be than the FWBO." At the same time she is alert to the fact that, in her own words, "the FWBO has tended to be run by men for a long time." Consequently she says:

> "There are still things about the Movement that are male based. But it does not have to be like that. Recently I joined the Council of the Centre here and I discovered that to be the Secretary you have to be a man, because the office is in the men's community, which is a closed community [women have no access]. My hackles rose a bit at that. But these are things that can change."

Punyamala also felt that part of the reason for such a state of affairs was because up to now women have concentrated on working together by organising women's retreats and study groups. One of the fruits of this endeavour was an increasing confidence and assertiveness among the women who now wanted to take their full place in the Movement.

The turning point for women adopting a more positive role in the FWBO is frequently cited as being the acquisition and conversion of a farmhouse in Shropshire. Along with adjoining barns and outbuildings, the house was converted into Taraloka the Movement's women's retreat centre. Fundraising and the building work for the project was accomplished by women, inspired and led by the retreat

centre's chairwoman, Sanghadevi. In 1988 660 women spent time on retreat at Taraloka, Women's ordination retreats and ceremonies are held there. In 1990 the ordinations sanctioned by Sangharakshita were carried out by three women Senior Order Members.[46] In the same year forty six women Order Members attended the Women's Order Convention at Taraloka. Prior to this women had joined with 180 men for four days of the two week long Men's Order Convention at a hired location in Lancashire.

Women in the FWBO, including those who are married or cohabiting with a male partner, appear to value single sex activities as a means for "gaining confidence in ourselves, free from the distorted images of femininity prevalent in society." [47]

For married women with families, such as Punyamala, single sex activities are one source of support for their spiritual lives, but for others the single sex ethic is fully integrated into the totality of their lifestyle. An example culled from the pages of Golden Drum is Ashokashri, who, writing in an issue devoted to the theme of friendship, describes her life working in a women's Right Livelihood wholefood business and living in a women's community in Croydon, "where to keep the atmosphere free from sexual games, argument and emotional dependence, no men are invited into the house." [48]

Ashokashri outlines what she conceives of as an ideal lifestyle conducive to women's spiritual development:

> "Such a situation will be created when women come together whose primary uniting factor is to look radically at their lifestyles, and who have the emotional freedom to create a situation which is totally supportive to their emerging individuality.
>
> To do this they must be prepared to leave aside present emotional involvements, such as boyfriends who may provide a certain sexual and emotional satisfaction, but who hold them back from pursuing higher aims
>
> This does not mean that a woman has to turn away from all men. There are a few men who can be helpful, able to provide guidance in her spiritual development, but any sexual or confused emotional involvement will not help a woman's individuality to develop." [49]

For Ashokashri participating in an all women team working together towards the fulfilment of a joint project, provides the right conditions for a "full satisfying life" that gets near forming a "genuinely radical alternative for women." Her way of life presents a realistic option to the "traditional" family group which is likely to hinder a woman's chances of "any higher fulfilment." [50]

Ashokashri and Punyamala articulate different versions of life as a woman Order Member, but the experimental ambience of the FWBO has so far enabled them to co-exist. The dictum that "commitment is primary and lifestyle secondary" has so far provided for a range of possible social arrangements and institutional patterns within the FWBO without creating contradictions likely to result in schism. The danger of latitudinous behaviour leading to fragmentation is somewhat mitigated by accompanying control mechanisms. These include the ascribed authority that is given to Order members over Mitras and the hierarchy within the Order based

on respect for senior Order Members. As has been pointed out, the businesses are in the process of being brought further under the control of the Order by the abandonment of the ICOM model rules and the creation of directors who are also officers at the nearby centres.

The effectiveness of control mechanisms within the Order are not easy for the outsider to distinguish or assess. One is left to surmise that frequent face to face contact among Order Members facilitates negotiated settlements of disputes and that those who reach a certain level of disagreement with the prevailing consensus are forced to leave. Something of this nature appears to have taken place at the Croydon centre during the late 1980s when argument focused on the competing demands of the Art Centre versus the Buddhist Centre. The founder of the Art Centre eventually left Croydon, and the Order, after what was by all accounts a painful and disruptive period.

Confidence in the ability to resolve problems through a system that merges notions of decision making based on consensus with authority vested in the "spiritually wise", is a hallmark of the FWBO and applies equally to the men's and women's wings of the Movement.

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CHAPTER NINE

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

During the 1980s British Buddhists following a variety of Asian traditions including Tibetan, Japanese and Chinese schools as well as the Theravada and the FWBO, founded between them a prison chaplaincy organisation, a Buddhist hospice project, a Buddhist animal rights group a Buddhism, Psychology and Psychiatry Group and a Buddhist Peace Fellowship. This last organisation advocates what has become known as "engaged Buddhism" and campaigns on issues relating to international peace, ecology and the human rights of Buddhists abroad.[1] Ken Jones author of The Social Face of Buddhism [2] and spokesperson for "engaged Buddhism" regards it as being composed of two interdependent aspects, one he terms social service, exemplified by the prison chaplaincy work; the other he terms social action. Jones defines social action as " to do with radical reform of institutions and public policies which tend to reinforce individual suffering and to inflame delusion," an example would be the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. He regards both social service and social action as "forms of Dharma practice." [3].

The emergence of these new Buddhist organisations during the past decade suggests that among British Buddhists there is a desire to move beyond the internal confines of groups and organisations whose central purpose is to disseminate Buddhist doctrines and meditation techniques. The momentum is towards a position where Buddhist perspectives can inform

and influence issues affecting society as a whole. How then do the Buddhists represented in this study regard the development and growth of their respective movements as likely precursors and agents of change within the wider society.

In the instance of the FWBO there exists a strong and colourful rhetoric depicting cherished aspirations in the socio-political arena. Subhuti has projected that by the turn of the century the FWBO will "have a significant impact on society. Without any compromise Buddhist principles will be carried into the heart of the world because many Order members and Mitras will be very actively engaged in transforming it." [4]

In the article from which the above quotation is drawn Subhuti envisages Wall Street and the City of London's financial institutions recognizing, through the success of businesses run by Order members becoming "household names," that "ethics is not incompatible with commercial success or caring with efficiency." Peering into his crystal ball Subhuti imagines that

> "a third of Order members and Mitras will be employed outside the Movement in work which is ethical and socially useful and, if possible, highly paid. A substantial proportion of their incomes will be donated for the work of the Movement. But they will also be in a position to influence the people they work with and, through their work, society at large." [5]

Subhuti paints a picture of the future where Order Members "perhaps in conjunction with other Buddhists" run welfare projects amongst the needy of developed nations as

well as in the Third World. In addition to involvement in education "some Order members will deliberately cultivate the communications media and will try to make contact with the influential in society." Others may be actively engaged in politics, particularly at the local level.

I asked Subhuti if his prophetic article was altogether serious and he assured me that it was. His confident, optimistic and ambitious tone is in fact fairly typical of the upbeat style of the FWBO. The actual substance of achievements to date is more modest than the rhetoric suggests, which is not to deny the actual gains that have been achieved partly through the encouragement of an emboldening rhetoric. The cheerful decisiveness and persistence that characterised the setting up of the FWBO's Norwich Centre, described in Chapter Four, is a case in point. The Theravadins on the other hand adopt a more muted approach to the possibilities of affecting change in the wider society, which I shall proceed to examine in some detail before returning to the variety of FWBO activities.

Overt political activity is no stranger to the Theravada Sangha in South East Asia, both in the past and in the present. The connection between the Sangha and political power elites has been touched upon already in previous chapters, and the contradictions that inevitably arise from monks embracing secular concerns. The British Sangha faithfully maintain the fully orthodox Theravadin belief that putting the world to rights has no part to play in achieving

ultimate liberation [6]. Ajahn Sumedho warns of the futility of trying to perfect the world.

> "If one starts to think of ways to change the world so that it will be perfect, one will become very bitter and disappointed. People get very upset when I say that, because they think that I am just not going to do anything. What needs to be done, I am doing. What does not need to be done, I leave alone. Just this condition: one does good and refrains from doing evil. That is all I can be responsible for. I cannot make the world (my concept of world) anything other than it is. That concept of world will change as we arouse wisdom within ourselves. We will then be able to look at the world as it is, rather than believe in the world as we think it is" [7]

Abandoning previous involvement with political causes, usually concerning either social deprivation or environmental issues, has been part of the path of renunciation for some members of the British Sangha. One bhikkhu, ordained during the course of my fieldwork, whom I interviewed as an anagarika, described his life after leaving university when he positioned himself "on the fringes of anarchist and feminist movements," and became immersed in social work and welfare rights. After two years he began to meditate which led him to review "the conflict that was inherent in a lot of the political activity." He told me

> "I found that within political work you had to operate and be involved in conflict. And I found that very painful. You seem to have to put a lot of energy into battling and struggle to win even a small step forward."

The British Sangha believe and teach that the focus of morality (sīla) centres on one's own life in the form of intentions and actions arising from thoughts and behaviour which should be skilful (Pali - kusala). Carrithers assesses

the connotations of this term as it appears in the Buddha's discourses recorded in the Pali Canon where its primary reference is to "skill in meditation." [8] But, says Carrithers, the Buddha also used kusala to refer to skill in moral discipline and in the acquisition of merit.

> "Indeed in many contexts "skilful" is the opposite of evil, and refers to the same kind of sharp distinction that is made in Christianity between good and evil. But for the Buddha 'skilful/good' always had a practical, not a metaphysical or absolute flavour to it. The dead centre of the term is best conveyed by a sense lost to us (but still alive among the ancient Greeks), that just as one could be skilful or good at a craft, so one could be good at being a sentient being and hence one could be good." [9]

The development of skilfulness as taught by the British bhikkhus depends on "arousing wisdom within ourselves", understanding what is best for ourselves and others, cultivating compassion and loving kindness and refraining from causing harm. Passionate attachment to convictions and causes is considered, like any other attachment, to lead to unwholesome states of mind. The desire for the success of the cause prompts greed; aversion to the perceived wrong doer prompts anger and the desire to annihilate. The consequences for others as well as oneself can be terrible. Ajahn Sumedho gave the following illustration of these processes in an interview in 1981.

> "The Khmer Rouge government believed that the middle class bourgeois was the cause of all suffering - so the government annihilated it." [10]

Example, as opposed to direct action, is the acceptable way to persuade others to question their morality. Ajahn

Pabhakaro, Abbot of the Harnham monastery at the time of writing, told me that world peace "depends on everyone getting their own body and mind together and finding their source of inner peace and stability." In this way the Sangha, with its strict standards of personal morality, its frugality and simplicity of life style is seen to be doing good in a society characterised by consumerism and competition for resources. A Harnham lay supporter said of the Sangha,

> "If there is something like this [the monastery] on your doorstep it doesn't matter whether you are a Buddhist or not you can't help but admire the way they live."

At the monasteries rubbish is carefully sorted and reused or despatched for recycling. Waste is frowned upon and fuel consumption carefully monitored, especially at Amaravati where the archaic and random heating system is a source of concern. Insulating the buildings at Amaravati has been a huge task.

Commitment to the conservationist ethic is traced back to the example of Ajahn Chah who, prior to his disabling illness, demonstrated concern for the fate of the forests that shelter his hermitage monasteries in North East Thailand. Ajahn Chah was invited by villagers to visit an area close to the Laotian border in 1969 when the completion of a dam led to the migration of many wild animals into the area. The villagers were worried that rising waters would destroy a relic venerated as a footprint of the Buddha and asked Ajahn Chah to organise its retrieval. Anxious for

the future of the remaining dry tropical forest and its now teeming animal life, Ajahn Chah, with the consent of local officials, decided to establish a monastery there. Because hunting in the vicinity of the forest monasteries is thought to be a source of negative kamma for the hunter the presence of a monastery was supposed to help to save the animals from the wholesale slaughter that was going on at the time. Ajahn Chah's idea was not only to start a monastery, but also to protect the forest and its wildlife.

In 1982 an Australian monk, Ajahn Puriso, was appointed Abbot of the monastery, known as Wat Karn (The Monastery by the Dam). Five years later he was interviewed by a member of the British Forest Sangha, Ajahn Munindo and the edited transcript published in the Forest Sangha Newsletter [11]. During the interview he spoke of the crucial role that the monastery had come to play.

> "If there were no monks here , everyone says there would not only be no animals left, but no forest left - it would all be turned into fields. So the forest of 1,000 acres has been fenced off."

Ajahn Puriso and his fellow monks (normally about five in number) began to feel that alone they were losing the battle to save the forest from fires that were often started deliberately to flush out the animals. They found themselves continously fighting fires particularly in the dry season when the temperature reaches over 100 degrees fahrenheit. They appealed to sophisticated lay supporters in Bangkok to publicise the plight of the forest and canvass for official

support. The result was that National Guards were sent to assist the monks and things improved.

Emulating the example of other forest monasteries established under the spiritual guidance of Ajahn Chah, the monks at Wat Karn began to combat misuse of forest resources by assisting inhabitants to improve the local economy by planting rubber trees. The plan consisted of planting a test area from which local villagers, being too poor to purchase rubber tree plants on the open market, could obtain cuttings. When invited to give Dhamma talks Ajahn Puriso began to try to get the conservation message across. His teaching, which matches in tone and content that of the British Forest Sangha, is essentially a Buddhist exigesis of ideas drawn from scientific ecology.

> "Buddhism does not have a specific teaching for conservation, because at the time of the Buddha there were no conservation problems. There is no direct teaching about conservation except loving-kindness and compassion. I tend to teach about being more heedful - the opposite of thinking:'Here I am in this world and I'll get what I want - nobody can stand in my way.' So its getting across the idea of asking, 'Where do I come from, how can I manage to live on this planet Earth...How many forces are there, how many conditions are necessary for me to be here?'
>
> " 'Where does your body come from? If you have a strong body, it's because mother and father had good genes, gave you good food, so these are the results of causes...' This is something we can talk to villagers about. Then I say this can be applied also to Mother Earth. Everything we are is just a reflection of our attitudes, how we think and behave. The West is so clever with science, making things grown faster by use of fertilizers, but is Nature really something separate from us that we can manipulate to our own ends? In actuality we are part of Nature. So if we are

treating Nature with lack of respect, we are destroying our own environment, and that will assuredly backfire.

"So that is what I talk about in Dhamma talks. Everywhere I go now I make it part of a talk, and because it is a new idea people sit and listen to it, not having considered it before. There is a sutta in the Buddhist scriptures where the Buddha speaks very positively about the planting of trees, and the benefit of digging wells - providing water for others." [12]

The sutta to which Ajahn Puriso refers is from Kindred Sayings Vol 1 .

"The Buddha said:
The planters of groves and fruitful trees,
and they who build causeways and dams,
and wells construct, and watering-sheds,
and (to the homeless) shelter give:
of such as these, by day - by night,
forever merit give."

During April 1990 Friends of the Earth declared an Earth Day which was observed at the monasteries in Britain with special chanting and "Dhamma reflection." The day was advertised in the Forest Sangha Newsletter as "an auspicious day for the lay people to bring trees or shrubs to the monastery for planting." [13]

The Vinaya prohibition against bhikkhus undertaking planting, pruning and digging has not prevented the British Sangha from ensuring the sound management of the woodlands at Amaravati and Chithurst. In this respect they have emulated the model already established in the Thai forests by Ajahn Puriso and other disciples of Ajahn Chah. Hammer Wood at Chithurst has a lay person as warden. His brief has been to "effect the restoration of native woodland and the establishment of Hammer Wood as a Nature Reserve and Monastic

Sanctuary." [14] The task involves restoring the eighty per cent of Hammer Wood that previous commercial forestry has reduced to "a desert for wildlife," and to reflect "conservationist ideas and the Buddhist accord with nature." [15] Species that were inappropriately introduced are being replaced by native English broad leaved species, especially oak. By 1988 4,000 trees had been planted, many of them by lay helpers who worked on special Forest Day visits to the monastery.

Another conservation project at Chithurst was the conversion of the fields around the monastery into wild flower meadows, again with the help of volunteers and expertise from lay people with specialist knowledge. Anagarikas, unlike the monks, are able to do the physical tasks involved in these kinds of projects, as are the nuns.

Ajahn Chah frequently employed metaphors drawn from nature to explicate Dhamma to his disciples, who in their turn carry on the practice. The monks see in the ever changing cycles of the natural world a constant reminder of the Buddha's teaching of the law of impermanence (paṭicasamuppāda). Like Ajahn Puriiso, the British monks teach that for human beings to see themselves as separate from nature is contrary to Right Understanding (Pali - samādiṭṭhi) as demonstrated by this quotation from a short article by Ajahn Amaro who, together with Ajahn Sumedho and Nick Scott, a layman and warden of a nature reserve, went on a nine day tudong walk in the Lake District.

> "Rock-hewn bridges, human constructions, enter disuse and pursue their cycles of change. Now green fronds emerge from between the stones, ivy clambers and moss distends across the wall. This is not nature reclaiming but our participation, the human element in the flow of change. Layers of sandstones now are split, and swirling ferns appear. As yesterday for a moment we were in the Lune - no river apart- sediment formed upon our feet as wee, wee fishes explored our toes, planted in the cool running water. The inner and outer landscapes we contemplate: complexity and stability are twinned in nature, and the stable heart is that which can accommodate all conditions in harmony. 'There is only one mind,' as the Ajahn (Sumedho) put it, 'and it is the ultimate simplicity which contains all complexity.'" [16]

Ideology renders the kinds of conservation schemes centred on the monasteries relevant in a number of ways beyond their intrinsic worth. Firstly they confirm the practical efficacy of Right Understanding. The view of human beings and the natural world as interdependent is then not just a view but a motor for action. For lay people living in a world bedevilled by ecological crisis this is reassuring. Secondly, the projects offer a prime example to combat criticisms, often made to lay people by their non-Buddhist acquaintances, along the lines that Theravada Buddhism is a world denying and introverted religion. Thirdly, environmental concern is spiritualised and personalised. The emphasis falls on what skilful actions a person can take through positive action in the immediate personal sphere through having understood the inter-connectedness of all life forms.

Another joint venture which the monastic community undertakes with lay supporters and with Buddhists of other

schools is their involvement with Angulimala, the Buddhist prison chaplaincy network in England and Wales. The Abbot of Harnham, Ajahn Pabhakaro and another senior monk Ven. Nyanaviro have several prisons in the area served by the monastery, some of which they visit on a regular basis, providing religious services and meditation instruction. Some of those prisoners who attend are experiencing their first contact with Buddhism beyond the pages of books.

Angulimala, founded in 1985, was the brain-child of Ajahn Khemadhammo, one of the American bhikkhus who first came to Britain from Thailand with Ajahn Chah in 1977. He subsequently left the original group to found a vihara, first on the Isle of Wight and later under the sponsorship of lay supporters in the village of Lower Fulbrook near Warwick. Patrons of Angulimala include Sangharakshita, founder of the FWBO and Ajahn Sumedho. Ex-prisoners appear among the membership and serve on committees Their participation in the organisation is much encouraged. By 1987 some thirty Buddhist chaplains were working in half the penal institutions in England and Wales.

Bald headed bhikkhus in strange robes might not seem the obvious candidates to achieve popularity among the prison population, but the response from many has been one of overwhelming acceptance. In a spontaneous borrowing from Christian terminology the inmates of northern gaols began to address the bhikkhus by the title "Brother," a habit which the bhikkhus themselves saw no cause to correct despite their

concern not to be confused with Christian monks as discussed in Chapter Five.

Writing to the Forest Sangha Newsletter from "H" Wing, the high security women's prison at Durham, a group of women expressed their appreciation of the meditation classes which they had been attending. Part of the letter stated,

> "Obviously prisoners feel themselves absorbed in personal problems and tend therefore to look inwards. There is as a consequence, a lack of community spirit and general caring. Plenty happens in prisons to cultivate the cynicism rampant in here: credulousness is not always helpful in these circumstances. But the cumulative effect of this cynicism is to distance us from the ideal of sincerity in people. The arrival of the 'Brothers' dented that wall of cynicism reminding us that there will always be the human attempt to 'improve' or 'be better.' Each reminder that such struggle exists and advances can only reinforce our sense of solidarity with the world, even if we're physically isolated." [17]

Ven. Nyanaviro considers that the monastic lifestyle provides points of convergence with the prisoner's own experience.

> "What we can offer is something that we cannot offer into a lot of other parts of society. A prison is a total institution and monastics are used to that total institutionalization of lifestyle. We know what it's like to be with yourself a lot, and to have a routine and discipline." [18]

One constantly reiterated teaching at all the monasteries is that one should accept the world as it is, with all its many flaws and then by the use of wise reflection learn to live skilfully for one's own benefit and the benefit of all beings. Ostensibly it is a teaching that gives rise to a fundamentally non-interventionist social

philosophy incompatible with highly politicised social activism. However there is a note of ambiguity attached, as the example of Ajahn Puriso's work in a remote corner of Thailand demonstrates. Here the logic of compassionate concern for all life forms has led the monks far beyond the quietist position of detached meditators into becoming guardians of the forest, which in turn involves the monks in attempts to introduce new means of subsistence for its human inhabitants. It could be said that in their dealings with the Forest Department, the Thai National Guard and the local people Ajahn Puriso and his companions have displayed very real political accomplishments. Judged alongside this precedent there is reason to suppose that the British Sangha is capable of similar kinds of involvement should the context be judged appropriate.

The FWBO and the New Society

The FWBO considers that to the extent that it "does not seek to give Buddhism a place in the Establishment so that Buddhists can carry out their own colourful practices and hold their own peculiar beliefs" it is "revolutionary." [19] The FWBO "wishes to change society - to turn the old society into the new." [20]]

At the heart of FWBO ideology is a belief in human perfectibility and the possibility of creating a social order where what is good for the individual is commensurate with the good of all. The means for achieving the beginnings of such a social order lie in the pursuit of "personal growth"

towards the Higher Evolution as explained in Chapter Four. The ideal conditions for personal growth include interaction with like minded people who form a mutual support group, thereby creating "ideal societies in miniature - existing in the midst of the wider social context." [21] The societies in miniature are the network of organisations - centres, communities and businesses - that together form the institutional structure of the FWBO.

Although the boundaries of these institutional forms are clearly defined they are not intended to stand isolated from the rest of the world, rather they are intended to have a meaningful impact upon it. Subhuti writes:

> "The true Buddhist has an active attitude to the world and seeks to work creatively upon it, to transform whatever is unskillful and restricting into positivity and freedom." [22]

A threefold strategy is directed towards achieving the transformative goals. Firstly there is attraction.

> "The members of the New Society seek to attract more and more people to it to inspire them also to develop and to help others to develop." [23]

Secondly there is example and the hope that the FWBO's institutions "will form a blueprint which will encourage others to transform themselves and the society around them."

Finally there is resort to criticism:.

> "...not only is support withdrawn from those features of the old society which are destructive and stultifying but, by actively demonstrating their faults and failings, change may be precipitated. Many people within the old society are uneasy in their membership of it, and criticism coupled with the active example of the New Society may help them to become free." [24]

Criticism is also regarded as important in order to "keep the New Society free of the failings of the old." [25] In relation to the separate members of the New Society personal criticism - "even forceful, heated criticism" - is an essential ingredient of kalyāṇa mitratā. [26]

As a prevailing force for cohesion and collective bonding friendship, as conceived in the FWBO, is figured as a robust and dynamic relationship. More will be said about this later, but for now I want to draw out the basis of the FWBO's social philosophy.

According to Sangharakshita the incubus which affects our modern era is ignorance of the true nature of progress. In the past progress has been falsely understood to reside in the material world, in the multiplication of gadgets, the raising of living standards, amenities and amusements. Experience, particularly the conflagration of World War Two, demonstrated that in acquiring "the bullion of progress we had in fact acquired only the tinsel of change." [27] True progress, as opposed to mere change, "is an achievement possible solely in the realm of the spirit." [28] Progress exists in things material "only to the extent that they are so ordered as to subserve the wide-winged aspiration of the spirit." [29]

Sangharakshita maintains that change consists in re-arrangements and re-adjustments to "outward and merely accidental things." Progress is achieved through "new qualities of consciousness and in introducing into the texture of existence uniquely original elements." [30]

The FWBO's social philosophy is essentially idealist and rests on the assumption that if people change society will change. The "ideal society in miniature" is thought to be responsible for changing people only to the extent that it sets up an initial object of attraction for people who are searching for a "healthy and enlivening environment" for the pursuit of personal development. Concern for others and the impulse to act on the world are presented as co-existent with concern for personal development. Indeed,because the path of personal development is founded on the Bodhisattva Ideal, it cannot be otherwise. Consequently FWBO members are enjoined not to bury themselves in rural backwaters, but to engage with urban life. The majority of FWBO centres are located in towns. The Buddha's instruction to his original followers to disperse and wander in order to preach Dhamma is reinterpreted by a Glaswegian member of the FWBO as meaning nowadays "to carry the light of the Dhamma into the streets of our cities." [31]

In the same issue of the Golden Drum from which the above quotation was drawn, and which is devoted to the theme of "Buddhism in the city," another author concludes that as our society is an urban society those who wish to have any hope of changing it will have to "put up with the rough and tumble of city life." [32]

There is no detailed or fixed manifesto for the New Society. Instead its features are sketched in a critique of those dangers that modern society carries; among them the

"restrictiveness and exclusivity of the nuclear family," with its "glorification of romantic love." [33]

Opposition to the nuclear family has been a characteristic of utopian and communitarian ideologies since the 19th century. [34] In their study of communes in Britain Abrams and McCulloch found that:

> "In so far as a motive for communes adequate on the level of meaning emerged from the research it lay in the perceived idiocy of normal domesticity."[35]

Characteristics attributed to the nuclear family were narrow mindedness, isolationism, egoism and lack of concern for others. These ideas expressed by Abram and McCulloch's communitarians as to the inadequacies of family life have long been available in the form of critiques assembled by anthropologists, psychologists and political scientists. For example, ideas about the harmful effects on the individual of sexual repression within the family and its ultimately dangerous consequences for the body politic are articulated by neo-Freudians and, according to Abrams and McCulloch, absorbed into the argot of the commune movement. [36]

The FWBO critique appears to draw upon a similar stock of ideas about the paucity of life experience in the context of the notionally typical nuclear family [37]. Christianity is also regarded as a major cause of sexual repression and guilt. Subhuti asserts that "today its psychological effects are still present in many who feel themselves to be ex-Christians."

Sangharakshita has suggested that as an antidote to past conditioning the ex-Christian may need to commit what he terms "therapeutic blasphemy." [38] He says that to rid oneself of the "fear and guilt instilled by a Christian upbringing" it is necessary to become a "non-Christian" not merely an " ex-Christian," by expressing emotional as well as intellectual rejection of Christianity.

> "It is not enough to deny in private, as an intellectual proposition, that God exists. One must publicly insult him." [39]

As might be deduced from these remarks, Sangharakshita is an advocate of the repeal of the common law of blasphemy. (Few of the FWBO's prescriptions for political reform are so specific.) Christian theism is said to bring about an "evasion of personal responsibility" and the idea of sin said to weaken and divide the individual against himself. Also to be eradicated from the New Society is the "loose set of ideas which might best be called pseudo-liberalism" Notions defined by Subhuti as "vaguely humanitarian, weakly egalitarian, superficially democratic," and "a doctrine of militant inadequacy." [40]

The positive aspects of the New Society are claimed to be represented and refined, according to the principles of the Higher Evolution, within the experimental ambience of FWBO institutions. Details are not to be regarded as immutable, providing that Buddhist principles are adhered to. As a result specific FWBO communities and businesses have considerable freedom of action to innovate, while the involvement of Order Members and the discussion of community

and business affairs on occasions such as local Order chapter meetings and conventions provides a check against continuous and serious transgressions.

In some FWBO businesses Order Members came to be in the minority of workers, and in one case a co-operative which took in non-Buddhist members finally ceased to be a Buddhist organisation altogether. It is in order to prevent this from occurring that the structure of the businesses has been changed to bring them under the wing of the local centres. Not everyone is interested in working for an FWBO co-operative, one of my interviewees had not enjoyed the experience and had no intention of repeating it, although it did not affect her brimming enthusiasm for the FWBO. Neither is personal application towards making real the vision of a New Society consistent throughout the Movement. I did not meet anyone who repudiated the idea altogether, although I did meet some for whom it was merely a distant and shadowy prospect. One Order Member told me: "I can understand what people mean by that. I can see it. I am not saying it is naive. I think it is true, but it is not what I personally relate to."

FWBO Businesses

The FWBO's businesses are vital to the Movement's financial standing, provide opportunities for what is known as Right Livelihood, create "spiritual communities" in action and act as a bridge with the non-Buddhist world. For all of these reasons they are highly valued. Order members and

Mitras may not necessarily spend their entire working lives in an FWBO business, but the majority are likely to have spent at least a year or two working within one or more of the businesses.

During the summer of 1988 I visited Windhorse Trading at its premises in Cambridge. Windhorse Trading began seven years previously as a market stall in London owned by two Order Members, buying and selling ethnic jewellery and gifts. Gradually, the business evolved, first as a wholesale business then as an importer constituted as a private limited company. The two Order Members then gave the business to Windhorse Trust, a registered charity. Windhorse Trading covenants all profits to the Trust, which disposes of them to various sectors within the Movement.

In 1987 £24,000 was distributed to the Guhayloka Retreat Centre in Spain, the Order Office at Padmaloka and to further the FWBO's work in India. Small sums went to individuals and organisations within the FWBO. Two Order Members were supported to work full time for the spread of the Dharma in Cambridge. In 1988 profits increased so that as well as re-investing in the business £40,000 was given away. Two Order Members acted as Trustees for the Windhorse Trust which actually disposes of the profits after consulting with Windhorse Trading's workers. Some money has gone towards the founding of a centre in Cambridge that was well underway at the time of my visit.

All but one of Windhorse Trading's fifteen strong workforce were at the time Buddhists living in two

communities close to the business premises. One of the community premises also housed the centre and was owned by the FWBO, the other being rented. Because the Order Members working in the business tend to become engrossed in the world, one Order Member was supported financially to care for the "spiritual welfare" of Mitras, lead the regular morning meditation and facilitate study groups.

Each employee agrees to operate on the principle of "give what you can, take what you need." I found this to mean that the managing director received £25 per week plus his board in the community. A salesman with a wife and two children to support received the same amount for his personal needs as did the managing director, but was made an extra allowance for his dependents. In another instance a warehousman who was interested in T'ai Chi received an extra amount to cover lessons. Basically all workers received the same wage and extra requirements were negotiated with the managing director. He told me that if he did not feel able to finalise the matter he would discuss it with those most directly concerned, or with his fellow Order Members depending upon the situation. He may tell the person making the request that it must be discussed at a weekly meeting of workers.

Workers at Windhorse Trading were allowed time off for retreats and sometimes for holidays paid for by the business. Prior to my visit a worker had requested a holiday, but the managing director felt that this was not what the worker needed. He talked the matter over with the worker and the

two of them arrived at a compromise whereby the worker went to Spain, where he had a few days holiday before going on retreat at Guhyaloka.

Beside the managing director two other Windhorse workers undertook managerial responsibilities, one a co-director and the other sales director. Together the three workers with managerial tasks were perceived by the other workers as being committed indefinitely to the development of Windhorse Trading. Others workers were much more likely to move on after a year or so with Windhorse and this fact was acknowledged.

Work routines and other matters were discussed by the entire workforce at regular weekly meetings and all workers were free to suggest new ideas and improvements, even in areas where they had no special experience or responsibility.

As dealers in "fancy goods" Windhorse Trading attempts to remain true to the vegetarian ethic encouraged by the FWBO and refuses to trade items made of leather. The managing director told me that for ethical reasons the workers had tried to improve the quality of the goods marketed. He said that in the past the business "used to get flak from others in the movement for selling tack." However, the general feeling among the Windhorse workers was that, providing the goods they market cannot be deemed "harmful," the quality of their "fun" jewellery and similar items is secondary. "Our primary motive," said the managing director "is to make money for Buddhism."

Personnel from Windhorse Trading are sent to visit the manufacturers and suppliers of goods from abroad to assess conditions among workers, but these kinds of ethical considerations often pose problems as the managing director explained:

> "If we had inklings of unscrupulous practices we would stop dealing with a particular company. We don't deal with certain notorious countries. We don't deal with South Africa, but we do buy jewellery from the Philippines. We turned down the opportunity to do business with the Imperial War Museum, although we had mixed feelings about that because visiting the Imperial War Museum could make people anti-war. We try not to buy products that contravene Buddhist principles and lead to negative mental states. Our business practice is generally straight forward and honest, and that is actually good for business and brings rewards."

Like Windhorse Trading, many of the FWBO businesses consist of all male or all female workers. Some may involve a mere handful of people; others like the Rainbow Co-operative at Croydon, turns over £350,000 per annum, supports 40 people and creates a surplus of £65,000 for the Movement.[41] Sometimes the businesses survive for only a short period. Others like the Cherry Orchard, a wholefood vegetarian restaurant adjacent to the London Buddhist Centre in Bethnal Green, have a long and successful history.

Businesses offering building services, joinery, window cleaning and gardening may come and go according to the requirements of the workers who may, for various reasons, decide to stop trading. Setting up these businesses is regarded as relatively simple, demanding little investment in property, stock or plant. Equally, they are easily closed

down without loss, providing they have remained in profit. More recently the retreat centres have been treated as businesses in that they are intended to be self supporting and not to require funding from other institutions within the Movement. People are employed to work at the retreat centres, as cooks, gardeners and administrators in the same way and on the same general terms as in the more conventional businesses. Other ventures include printing, design, publishing, wholefood retailing, bookselling and a gift shop.

There is generally a high turnover of personnel within the businesses, with people frequently moving from one business to another [42]. The range of possible business activities has been constrained by the need for activities that require minimal skills thereby reducing the restriction on who can work for them.

Working in an FWBO business for little financial gain and thereby creating profits for the Movement is interpreted as a particularly generous form of <u>dāna</u> and conducive to the spiritual path of the aspirant Bodhisattva. Dharmacari Nagabodhi says:

> "Giving is a sign of psychological, not to say spiritual health. And giving, dana, is the first perfection that the Bodhisattva has to master: it comes even before morality, and far before meditation and wisdom as the first "stage" of the Bodhisattva path." [43]

The Bodhisattva, it will be recalled, is equivalent to the True Individual. Aspirations and drives towards the much valorised individuality and self-autonomy are, by this route, guided towards social ends. The collectivity, with its "dāna

economy," [44] provides the infra-structure for the pursuit of individuality, measured according to the Bodhisattva ideal described in Chapter Four. Those who do not earn their daily bread in the Movement's businesses may still provide the Movement with services and finance. Some do so through a "work a month" scheme "in which those participating, who have ordinary jobs, live as simply as they can for a month and give all excess income over expenditure to the nominated cause." [45]

The most highly intensive and energetic fund raising activity in the FWBO is carried out to support the Indian branch of the Movement, known as the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana (The Association of Helpers of the Buddhist Great Sangha of the Three Worlds. Members of the TBMSG are ex-untouchables, followers of the late Dr. Ambedkar, the untouchable politician and reformer who repudiated the Hindu caste system and the inequalities of untouchability. Six weeks before his death in 1956 Ambedkar converted to Buddhism, urging his followers to do likewise.

Like Sangharakshita Ambedkar was critical of orthodox Theravada Buddhism as he found it practised in Sri Lanka and Burma, describing the Sangha as "a huge army of idlers." To describe his kind of revised Buddhism Ambedkar alighted on the term "navayana" which roughly translates as neo-Buddhism. (46) After Ambedkar's death Sangharakshita was active in consoling the leader's huge following of newly converted Buddhists in western India. Later he returned on an educational mission, undertaking a series of preaching tours

during the period from February 1959 to May 1961 among neo-Buddhists in Nagpur, Bombay, Poona, Jaipur and Ahmedabad. [47] On returning to England in the mid 1960s Sangharakshita maintained his contacts with the Indian neo-Buddhist movement and in 1978 one of his English disciples, Dharmacari Lokamitra, established a branch of the FWBO in Pune.

Indian men and a few women took Ordination into the WBO and the numbers of followers of what was by then known as the TBMSG were increased between 1979 and 1980 when Sangharakshita made two tours of Maharashtra. [48] His association with Dr. Ambedkar and the early days of the neo-Buddhist movement enhanced Sangharakshita's reputation and brought large audiences to his rallies. In one speech Sangharakshita identified the Buddhists of the FWBO with the neo-Buddhism advocated by Ambedkar declaring:

> "I am a New Buddhist; Dr Ambedkar was a New Buddhist; the great Emperor Ashoka was a New Buddhist; even Gautama the Buddha himself was a New Buddhist! The only good Buddhist is a New Buddhist." [49]

Back in England the FWBO began to collect funds to support the ex-untouchable neo-Buddhists of western India leading to the founding of an associated charity known as Aid For India. At the time of writing Aid For India is still in existence, but its work is in the process of being transferred to the auspices of the Karuna Trust, which it is hoped will carry out aid projects in other countries as well as in India.

In India the TBMSG developed a social welfare wing known as Bahujana Hitaya (For the Welfare of the Many) operating

education hostels, after schools classes, kindergartens, training skills programmes and a health clinic. British members of the FWBO, particularly those with medical or educational qualifications, are sent to assist the projects.

Fund raising for these projects back in Britain provides members of the FWBO with an opportunity to develop and display their commitment to Buddhism. Several times a year small numbers of volunteers assemble from various parts of the country for fundraising work. They represent a wide spectrum of occupations. An Aid for India publication mentions a team including a solicitor and a concert cellist. [50] The teams live together in communities especially established for the duration of the work and receive some initial training. Their major task is to appeal for regular covenants to the charity by knocking on doors in selected neighbourhoods and explaining the work of the various projects.

During Aid For India's accounting year ending in August 1983 one appeal for projects in Pune raised cash and promises worth £3,000 per year over the following seven years bringing the total promised income (including that previously pledged) for the Pune scheme to over £1,150,000. The second appeal for Action in Education, held during three summer months in 1983, generated a promised income of £225,000 over seven years. The whole amount was raised in nine weeks by a team of ten people. [51]

Volunteer participants describe the experience of fundraising as emotionally exhilarating and intense. One

interviewee, who possessed a marked Glaswegian accent, described the trauma of numerous rejections on English doorsteps combined with the elation of eventual success.

> "It was murder sometimes. I broke down crying in the street and felt so much despair. Probably a lot of people couldn't understand my accent. But at the end I felt really brilliant. I earned about £24,000 for the charity in ten weeks. You had caused that sum to be put towards helping ex-untouchables. It does give you confidence in yourself, because even if you are crying you still have to keep going."

At the time of the appeal the interviewee was a Mitra and a year later attended the annual ordination retreat leading to his becoming an Order Member. The experience as a member of an appeal team, working and living closely together for ten weeks and sharing the emotional highs and lows of fundraising, clearly marked an important stage in his spiritual career. The fundraising teams provide a vivid illustration of the FWBO ethos that narrow self-interest is most readily transformed into fruitful self-development within the context of intense collective endeavour. The same objectives are to be found in the more protracted experience of living in an FWBO community

Communal Living

Abrams and McCulloch came across a whole range of types of communes, and quasi-communes, during their research into the British commune movement during the 1970s and found it

difficult to make generalisations that might apply to them all. However, one point they did feel compelled to make about communes in general has particular relevance for a discussion about FWBO communes , or communities as they are generally called in the Movement. This point centres on their view of the commune as being " trapped in a paradox well known to ancient and medieval social thought, the paradox of the attempt to institutionalise friendship." [52] In their view:

> "Ours is surely one of the very few types of society which have not created distinctive institutions of friendship: our pubs, clubs and the rest are rather substitutes for them, havens of created sociableness without real and lasting substance. Perhaps it is after all not so strange that the very terms for serious friendships used by the Greeks, *philia*, and the Romans, *communicatio*, are ones we find it difficult if not embarrassing to translate. Were all these people Socrates talks about really 'lovers'?" [53]

Graham Allan while agreeing that "friendship in English culture is not institutionalised," has taken sociologists and anthropologists to task for failing to distinguish between the many possible varieties of friendship that exist in our society. [54] He complains that relationships characterised by "strong emotional attachment, feelings of empathy, mutual sympathy and understanding" are classified as full friendship, and that the "dictates of Aristotle are taken as the defining criteria of any friendship worthy of the name." [55] In his own work Allan treats a range of relationships as friendships. But he also concludes that the notion of

"real and true friends" has its roots in social reality where "trust and shared knowledge" enter the picture. [56]

In this respect true friends

> "...approach aspects of some primary kin relationships, because while most people attempt to keep at least part of their inner selves secret from the majority of their primary kin and would by no means reveal to them every aspect of their life, these kin often know - or imagine they know - what the individual is really like." [57]

Such is the "true friendship" that Abrahams and McCulloch identify with the realisation of a classical idea of friendship, and take to be "one of the distinctive and defining purposes of contemporary communalism." [58]

During their research Abrams and McCulloch became chiefly interested in what they termed "secular family communes" where groups lived together "simply in order to live together, on account of the goodness of living together." [59] As a type the secular family commune differed from what the authors deemed to be utopian communities where members adhered to an inclusive ideology which "relates all aspects of life, giving the group an adequate framework of action for all situations, an ontology, epistemology and a sense of where the group is going." [60]

A third general type of communal project recognised by Abrams and McCulloch is the purposive commune described as "groups of people who were living together to promote a cause or realise a faith or effect a cure." [61] In communes of this type, including religious communes, they found community to be subordinated to the interests of the "faith or therapy or liberation." [62]

FWBO communities do not fit readily into any one category in Abram's and McCulloch's threefold typology of communes. The single sex ethic obviously sets FWBO communities apart from the secular family commune. Nevertheless like the secular family communes the FWBO do stress the "idea of friendship as an enrichment of self through interaction with others who are in effect second selves." [63] For Abrams and McCulloch the individualism of this type of project is a threat to the cohesion of utopian communities which seek to institute a social order existing over and above its members. Yet we have seen that in its proclaimed aim to create a New Society, the FWBO is utopian, especially in the light of certain inclusive and non evaluative definitions of utopia arrived at by political scientists. Levitas, for example, defines utopia as "that state of society ultimately aspired to by an individual or group, irrespective of how it could be realised." [64] Dharmachari Subhuti's assertion that the FWBO community is "the basic living unit of the New Society..." leaves little doubt as to its fundamentally utopian orientation [65].

FWBO communities are quite distinctively "purposive" in Abram and McCulloch's sense of the term and exist to promote the values and practices of Buddhism among members. In the FWBO communality is harnessed to that purpose, rather than subordinated as Abrams and McCulloch imply is the more typical of purposive communes.

FWBO communities are invariably "single sex", but may differ considerably in size from a mere handful to twenty

five or more and women's communities may include children of both genders. Communities can consist entirely of Order Members or a mixture of Order Members, Friends and Mitras. In the latter case Order Members are expected to "lead and inspire." In 1990 approximately 137 male Order Members and twenty five women Order Members lived in FWBO communities in Britain. The oldest community is Aryatara at Purley, which at the time of writing has survived for 18 years. Several other communities are also of long duration. Some small communities may be intentionally temporary or fold when the lease on a property runs out, or disperse merely because members move on without being replaced.

Communities are often attached to centres as at Norwich and at Bethnal Green, or are composed of members of Right Livelihood businesses as illustrated by the example of Windhorse Trading where efforts to establish a centre grew out of the community. Some communities are dedicated to intensive meditation practice such as the rural retreat centres. In other instances community members may have no specific shared task or work and contain a majority with jobs outside the FWBO. Even in those communities attached to centres members may include students or people with "ordinary" jobs.

There is no fixed set of rules governing all FWBO communities, which are organised autonomously by members according to their own requirements. It is however usual for candidates for membership to have experience of at least one long FWBO retreat as an introduction to communal living, and

he or she is likely to be asked to join a community on a trial basis before being accepted as a full member. The community can ask an individual member to leave if there is collective agreement that the member concerned is not suited to community life or has made insufficient effort to contribute to the collective. Leaving a community for these reasons does not necessarily entail abandoning the FWBO. Even after two or more years' service to a community, one who is asked to leave may be just as likely to seek another niche within the Movement [66].

Most communities have regular weekly meetings where all matters relating to the community are discussed. Domestic duties and household maintenance are usually shared on a rota basis. Larger communities may appoint a full-time housekeeper to organise and regulate tasks.

Commensality is another normal feature of community life, as is the early morning meditation session, suggesting a parallel with the practices of monastic life where those who meditate together also eat together. Carey, commenting on a similar feature among members of the Ramakrishna Mission in Britain, asserts that communal meals are more than just the mere ingestion of food for bodily survival. The act of eating together symbolises the ritual unity of the participants. "Those who eat together are ritually of the same kind in terms of their commitment to a particular form of life." [67]

The reason for living communally is generally spoken of as providing opportunities to develop spiritual friendship.

Spiritual friendship is, alongside meditation, credited with potentially transformative qualities, so that even the personal conflicts that can arise in communal living may elicit change in the individual. An article in Golden Drum states: "Sometimes...we come to understand what it is in us that has produced the conflict. Thus we are able to resolve it by changing ourselves." [68]

Some couples involved in a sexual relationship choose to live separately in single sex communities partly for the sake of developing spiritual friendships with members of their own gender. It is a practice endorsed by Sangharakshita on the basis that it ensures couples have a "more truly human relationship between them, because they allow themselves space." Conjugal visits are not always permitted in communities which may chose to bar all members of the opposite gender. I was not admitted to the Cambridge men's community for this reason. The two married men living there did not have any female relations visit them at the community house.

Because it is seen as extremely fertile ground for spiritual friendship, living in a community is greatly encouraged, although some members of the Movement have never lived in a community, often because they have a partner who is not a member of the FWBO, as was the case with five of my interviewees. Others may live semi-communally. For example the case of Punyamala, her husband and their friend in Norwich cited in Chapter Eight. In East Anglia I met another couple, one a Mitra, one an Order Member, and their two

children. Another Order Member lived in a caravan in the couple's back garden. He told me:

> "My experience with people in the Movement who are married is that they make you feel part of their family, more like an extended family. I am involved with the family here.
> "The bigger the Movement gets the more married people there will be, because you can't legislate against it. What we would want to avoid is the traditional idea of the family as an enclosed body where you are caught up in your own world."

Even those who have no experience of living communally are presented with the possibility of going on long retreats where they take part in communal living on a temporary basis and are encouraged to develop spiritual friendships. One Dharmacari Jayamanti has suggested that the newcomer to the Movement might be forgiven for thinking that he has hit upon an organisation devoted to the making of friendships [69]. Explaining the significance of inter-personal relationships in the FWBO, Jayamanti goes on to say that friendship with an Order Member is an essential part of the Process of Going For Refuge:"

> "It is unrealistic to attempt to "love" the Sangha unless you can love a single member of it. Unless you can meaningfully and deeply engage with at least one member of the Sangha, your Going For Refuge to the Three Jewels will be largely academic and theoretical. The Third Jewel starts to shine on the formation of a spiritual friendship." [70]

The sources of the Buddhist Sanskrit term for spiritual friendship, kalyāṇa mitratā, were explained in Chapter Four. In the FWBO the term is often applied to a pedagogic relationship between one who is considered to be more spiritually developed than the other, as between an Order

Member and a Mitra. In this sense it is close to the Pali equivalent kalyāṇa mitta/tā. Sometimes in the FWBO the term "vertical friendship" is used to describe the pedagogic relationship. Spiritual friendships are also deemed to exist between people of equal spiritual development, although the sense is then of a horizontal relationship.

An article by Dharmacari Vajraketu describes his spiritual friendship with Dharmacari Ruchiraketu. [71] The pair attended the same ordination retreat and had previously worked together in establishing a Right Livelihood building business. The article enunciates the history of the friendship and the efforts that both friends have made to break down barriers against complete openness and frankness. These two qualities are considered to be essential for friendship to blossom. At the time that the article was written the two friends had spent nine months on a retreat at Vajraloka. Of this period the author writes:

> "Much is made in Buddhism of the spiritual significance of confession, and indeed Ruchiraketu and I do sometimes confess things to each other; but of almost equal value, at least to me, is the opportunity of sharing the thousand and one thoughts and feelings that go to make up an ordinary day, that in a sense go to make up what one is. It is wonderful to be able to tell someone how out of proportion this or that petty thing has become, how this or that doubt is bothering me, or to speak of the ambitions and desires, noble and ignoble, that are on my mind, of the fantasies that will not go away - nothing in itself of any great significance, too small to bother people who are not really interested in you, yet important enough to mean that being able to express them, to have someone listen, hear and understand, leads to a feeling of relief, content, like the satisfaction one feels after cleaning up an untidy room." [72]

Here we return to Abrams and McCulloch's diagnosis that communal living in Britain is frequently an attempt to provide institutional expression for a highly valued form of inter-personal relationship. A clue to why FWBO communes fail to fit Abram's and McCulloch's categories is to be discovered in examining their antecedent institutions. For while rejecting orthodox monasticism as inappropriate to modern Western society and identifying with the neo-Buddhists of India, the FWBO has incorporated at the very least some of the spirit of Buddhist monasticism drawn from the Pali scriptures. The Western Buddhist Order is identified as a Sangha and marriage and other primary kinship relations are intended to be modified in such a way as to serve rather than detract from its interests. As with monks, who are altogether outside reproductive kinship relations, friendship becomes the "appropriate form of affection and reciprocity." [73] Collins asserts that Christian and Buddhist monasticism share this feature, which balances against the equally strong ideology of individuality, also to be found in both the Christian and Buddhist monastic traditions.

According to Collins the example of Christian monasticism is one of the rare examples where friendship has been successfully embedded in a non-localised form that has survived over centuries throughout Western culture, Although its impact has been more indirectly felt during modern times in predominantly Protestant countries. The FWBO stands in the unique position of being heir to both the Christian and the Buddhist models. For as Collins argues utopian visions

been heavily influenced by the availability of a model drawn from the example of the Christian monastic community. It is a model of individuals contracting together to found the earthly equivalent of the heavenly city made possible because in Christianity "the mundane world constitutes at least one area for activities that are relevant to salvation." [74]

In contrast monastic Buddhism saw no means of salvation in activities devoted to "the reconstitution of the mundane world" which is merely the very saṃsāra from which release is sought." [75] Through this analysis, which I have somewhat simplistically summarised for the sake of brevity, Collins recognises Christian monasticism as one important religious source of Western individualism. I have already made plain that FWBO ideology draws upon Western social philosophies of individuality, as found in gestalt psychology and the Romantic movement in literature and philosophy, to support its theory of the True Individual. Simultaneously the FWBO depends on its reworking of the Buddhist monastic virtue of "good friendship" to establish bonds between members and to generate solidarity.

By blending these two influences FWBO communes reconcile the individualistic tendencies and utopian aspirations which Abrams and McCulloch regard as producing separate and incompatible styles of contemporary communal projects.

Summary

The British Forest Sangha appears not to be concerned to provide a charter for social change. It confines itelf to the fundamentalist Theravada teaching about the triple malaise of greed, hatred and ignorance which affects all human beings at all times and in all contexts, and is curable only through the Buddha's prescription as laid out in the Noble Eightfold Path. It is a highly ascetic, even stark solution. I have heard monks say that for people of certain temperaments it understandably appears to be too austere. Even long standing and deeply committed lay followers sometimes baulk at the unadorned ascetcism as they try to balance its undoubted appeal for them with life in the secular world. One woman spoke to me about a period when she began to wonder if the Theravada tradition was " a bit repressive and not making it easy for people who are in the world to actually live in the world and to cope with their nature and the emotions."

The arts, especially dance, had played a vital role in the life of this particular woman prior to her immersion in Buddhism, after which she says:

> "I switched all that stuff off: put the dampers down. The only thing I would allow myself was social good works, hence my job in social work. That was my luxury. I was almost trying to live a Buddhist monastic life in the world, which doesn't make sense."

As a result the lay woman visited Tibetan Buddhist Centres in Britain and began to incorporate Mahāyāna

meditation practices into her routine. She explained how this had helped her over her impasse.

> "I felt that as lay people we were maintaining something that is certainly worthwhile, but one half of me was looking at the world and asking what does the world need? The Sangha is offering ONE refuge, but not the total answer. I feel a commitment to the world as well as to the Sangha. Those two were not marrying and through the Mahāyāna practice they did marry because they (the Mahāyānists) do not put so much emphasis on whether or not you are ordained.
>
> "We had so many good things going on here at Harnham, it didn't feel appropriate for me to just give it all up and go off. It was too easy for it to be the right thing to do. The point I am at for the moment is a feeling that any little move that has some community feeling about it and reaches out, and that doesn't have the Theravada stamp I will support - anything that encourages people to feel good about themselves and has a more therapeutic aspect like meditation, massage, yoga, trying to reach out into the arts, the creative side. Not to repress, not to neutralise, but to really reach out into the world. I want to complete my own story. One or two people that I have talked to are starting to sort of feel the same. I don't know where it will lead to or that it should be a big thing."

The tensions expressed in the quotation between the ascetic ideal and the need to act creatively in the world are not apparent in the interviews with members of the FWBO who are encouraged to participate in literature, drama and the visual arts as a means of expressing their religiosity. These kinds of activities are part of what is required to create the New Society, likened to the Pure Land of the Bodhisattva.

The Mahāyāna Sutras describe myriads of world systems or Buddha fields (Skrt - buddhakṣetra). As mentioned in Chapter

Four, pure realms contain only Bodhisattvas while impure realms like our own world contain beings at various stages of spiritual development. However, the implacable non-dualism of the Mahāyāna theorists led to an interpretation whereby there could be no ultimate separation between the impure and pure realms; ultimately all fields are one. Conze explains how, because the Buddha figure in the Mahāyāna tradition is omnipresent, " this world is essentially the ideal world if one will only recognise it as such." [76]

The FWBO's vision of a New Society is informed by Mahāyāna thought. Subhuti writes:

> "The human Bodhisattva, whether novice or of the Path, tries to create a Pure Land on Earth. More especially, he works with others, with the Sangha, to create the best possible conditions for growth, here and now. He tries to bring into being a movement of people who are inspired by the vision of the Three Jewels. He tries to establish the institutions in which people can live and work together on the basis of those Ideals.
>
> He tries to bring about a culture which carries the full perspective of the Higher Evolution to as many people as possible. All his efforts are directed to forming a new society which has spiritual evolution as its central value." [77]

Here then is a perspective which inextricably associates personal development with social change, so that the Buddhist life is expressed not only by dedication to the transformation of the individual self, but also to the transformation of the world [78]. For the FWBO social change is advocated not merely as the result of the personal

development of the individual, but also a means by which that accomplishment can be assisted. In this view social change can be conducive to Enlightenment by providing the optimum conditions for it.

The perspective adopted by the British Forest Sangha calls for acceptance of the ultimate imperfectability of human existence and focusses on notions of harmlessness as a means of mitigating the sufferings that people inflict upon themselves, upon one another and upon non-human life forms. The ideal of harmlessness is however not to be achieved by doing nothing. To live harmlessly means adopting ways of life and forms of association that make for social harmony and a sustainable environment. The bhikkhu-saṅgha itself should ideally be the prime example for such a way of life and so guide the aspirations of the lay people towards the values it embodies.

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CHAPTER TEN

LEARNING TO BE BUDDHIST

There exists within the Buddhist community in Britain a set of shared understandings by which it may be defined and delineated. Some of these concepts are commonly held; others are specific to particular Buddhist movements; the notion of "form" among the Theravādins which was explained in Chapter Seven is one example; another would be the idea of the True Individual which is restricted to the FWBO. Becoming a Buddhist involves learning to understand what fellow Buddhists are talking about, what their actions mean and how to behave accordingly onself. All this entails induction into what Goffman has termed "primary frameworks" which structure experience along particular lines [1]. Such frames are more or less organised "systems of entities, postulates and rules" or "guided doings." [2] Taken all together the primary frameworks which govern interactive processes within a particular social group "constitute a central element of its culture..." [3]

The frames for interaction in each of the Buddhists groups in this study are revealed in a variety of behaviours both linguistic and non-linguistic, and sometimes in a combination of the two. In what follows special attention will be given to the significance of language due to the fact that Buddhists themselves attach special moral and philosophical values to its use. However, the overall intention is to provide an analysis of

implicit meanings as they emerge through the use of language and other interactive strategies.

Previously, I drew a parallel between the Quakers (Society of Friends) and Buddhists in relation to the value that is invested in the notion of silence. I wish to return to that discussion here because, as Bauman points out, silence is part of "the communicative economy of any society" [4], and it is thus reasonable to suppose that where there are comparable similarities in attitudes towards silence there will also be comparable attitudes towards speech. And, indeed, this proves to be the case with Bauman's seventeenth century Quakers and the Buddhists featured in my ethnography.

Bauman describes the attitude of the early Quakers towards speech as "fundamentally ambivalent, coupling a basic distrust of speaking with a recognition that it was essential and desirable for certain purposes which were central to the religious goals of the Society of Friends" [5]. The Quaker distrust of speaking relates to their "doctrine of direct personal revelation and the Inner Light." [6] For while accepting the orthodox Protestant doctrine that divine revelation is manifest in the Scriptures, the Quakers also subscribed to a theory of continuous revelation. Each person was conceived as able to have an internal direct personal experience of the Spirit of God through a faculty known as the Inner Light. Access to the Inner Light required the suspension of "natural and earthly faculties" through silent

contemplation and waiting upon God. Hence the practice of silence became an important religious activity, and speech in all its varieties was measured against the value of silence. Bauman says that :

> "Although silence became the Quaker metaphor for the suppression of every kind of worldly impulse, activity and inclination, the referent from which it was generalised was speech." [7]

Writing about Buddhist views of language Gomez echoes Bauman when he states.

> "Any tradition that seeks mystical silence becomes intensely involved with the question of the role of language in religion. Silence presupposes speech; concern with the former reflects a concern with the latter." [8]

In Buddhism the Third Factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, the prescriptive path to liberation, is Right Speech. Right speech appears in the Five Precepts of the laity as abstention from untruth. But the followers of the British Forest Sangha are taught by the monks to treat this Precept as much more than a resolve not to tell lies. Lay people who are serious about their Buddhist practice are encouraged to emulate the monks in exercising "restraint" (Pali - saṃvara) in their utterances. This means foregoing idle gossip and speculation which may smear the reputation of another or lead to misunderstanding, as well as avoiding exaggeration, argumentative postures and derogatory remarks about others. I have heard many lay people say that a "refined" understanding of this Precept makes it the most difficult to follow. As guests at the Theravada

Monasteries lay people are requested to respect its peace and quiet and to follow the standards set by the monastics. Part of this means "guarding" one's speech in the ways described above, but also by not talking in a loud or strident voice, or shouting out to attract another's attention. These unspoken rules of conduct are conveyed by the generality of their implementation rather than through explicit codes or written regulations. People simply copy the monks and nuns in this respect, and should there be serious lapses the guest-master or mistress will remind errant visitors of the inappropriateness of their behaviour. Of course part of the reason for encouraging a quiet atmosphere at the monastery is so as not to interfere with people who are meditating. In the Mahavagga monks are forbidden to wear sandals inside the monastery lest their clatter disturb meditation [9] However the quietism and the restraint of speech has more than a practical significance for it is linked to the most serious purposes of Theravada Buddhism.

In the first place the concern for language is attached to the ultimate goal of liberation from saṃsāra and in the second to the preservation of Dhamma, realisation of which is essential for liberation. The Sangha is the repository and disseminator of Dhamma through the medium of language. As Gomez has it: " It is impossible to remain in the realm of pure silence yet claim to practice a religion in a religious community." [10] The solution is for the silence of the Buddha, who is "beyond

the paths of speech" to be manifested through the words of his teachings as recorded in the canon (Buddhavacana). The fact that the Buddha taught in words means that language is not necessarily false. "It is not misleading under all circumstances, because it can be used 'skilfully' as a 'means' (upāya)." [11]

The Theravada view is that language, particularly speech, must be made to work for, rather than against, the goal of Enlightenment.

The Medium and the Message in the Theravada

The communicative repertoire of the Theravada Sangha is rich in its variety of genres. I have already mentioned and elaborated on some of these, for example the sermons (desanā), the chanting (paritta), the formulae used in exchanges between lay people and monks, the uposatha recitation by the monks and the ordination ritual (upasampadā). Among these examples I would also want to include the alms-round (piṇḍapāta) and the receiving of food at meal times at the monastery. For even though carried out in silence they may equally be classified as "verbal code" because the very absence of speech has an "intentional communicative function" [12].

When I accompanied nuns on almsround I was told that we might talk quietly when walking through open countryside, but not when walking through inhabited parts of the village. Silence was thus imposed in order to convey the "correct" impression of restrained and concentrated comportment as dictated by the form, here meaning the nuns' rule, modelled on the Vinaya. Special instructions concerning the maintenance of silence on alms round appear in the Vinayapiṭaka. Monks are forbidden to "prompt their benefactors in any way when begging" and not to "utter any request, nor express any preference." [13] Wijayaratna indicates that the origin of the rule was to prevent monks from pestering people for food. The Pali texts reveal that in the developing urban society of sixth century India opposition to begging as a means of livelilhood was strongly

expressed, notably by orthodox brahmins "who thought it degrading" [14]. This echoes the contemporary situation in Britain where some people express strong disapprobation when they see monks on alms-round. "I disapprove of it frightfully," asserted one well-heeled resident of Chithurst village.

When offering food to monks lay people are also expected to follow certain linguistic conventions, though they vary slightly according to context and degree of formality being observed. In the most formal setting, such as the presentation of an entire meal to monks by a group of lay people, like that depicted in a scene from the BBC documentary "The Buddha Comes to Sussex," the laity affect highly stylized forms of behaviour. The scene I have in mind shows the monks seated together on the floor before a shrine that has been set up in a marquee. The meal is being offered by members of the Hampshire Buddhist Society. Shuffling forward, one at a time, in a kneeling posture, lay people approach the most senior monk, on this occasion Ajahn Chah himself, who was visiting Chithurst, and hand him the tray or bowl of food they are carrying. They then bow and retreat without having uttered a word. In less formal circumstances, such as offering a monk or nun a cup of tea, the lay person should say: "May I offer you a cup of tea, bhante/venerable/Ajahn?" before the beverage is actually handed over.

On one occasion I was a passenger in a mini-bus with several lay people (all of whom were women) plus a number of

monks and an anagarika. The handing out of sweets and drinks by the women punctuated the long journey and each time care was taken firstly to enquire if the item being offered to the monks was permitted, as very few things can be consumed by monks once the noon deadline for their only meal is passed. Next the handing over of permissible items was accompanied by the request - "May I offer you.....". And finally the actual handing over of the items was directed to the anagarika to pass on to the monks. The point was to avoid the monks having to decide whether or not to get out their offering cloths, described in Chapter Eight. Us women were thus able to render the appearance of the cloth unnecessary: a relief because its use made some of us feel awkward and we knew some monks were also discomforted by it (partly because they know many women dislike the practice).

The injunction that everything that they ingest should be "properly offered" is scrupulously observed by the nuns and monks. It has to be absolutely clear that the item is intended for them either by being directly placed into their hands or by the polite request "May I offer......"
I once came across two nuns trying to decide whether it was permissible for them to drink tea that had been set down by an invisible hand adjacent to where they were working. It was time for tea break, and as nobody else was around all the signs indicated the tea was intended for them. But the tray of tea had not been given in their presence, causing subsequent uncertainty. The situation was saved by my

intervention. As a lay person I was able to "formally offer" the tea.

Wijayaratna translates a relevant text from the Vinaya, source of the incident narrated above, as follows:

> "Monks must not eat food which they have not received from someone else's hands. If a monk does eat food which he has not received from someone else's hands he commits an offence in the pācittya category." [15]

The pācittya category of offences require confession. Had the nuns drunk the tea, in the reasonable but not certain assumption that it was intended for them, they would in all likelihood have "mentioned" the fact to another nun for their code contains the same categories of offence as Vinaya.

Though it is drawn from the minutia of monastic life the tea incident is fully illustrative of many of the points already made regarding the formal patterns of interaction, traced through language and gesture, that mark relations between people of different status. The tea stands before the nuns. The question is whether or not they should drink it. Or, perhaps more pertinently, is this tea drinkable? In the reality shared by the nuns, objectified in their rule, the tea is manifestly not drinkable unless it has been formally offered. Only then is it allowable (Pali - kappiya). It requires the action of a lay person or an anagarika to make the tea drinkable. Commenting on the origins and implications of this feature of the Vinaya Wijayaratna speculates:

> "Even if they [monks and nuns] chanced upon some food, they were not allowed to eat it. In this matter they were completely dependent

> on others, like small children or hospitalized sick people." [16]

The difference of course between these two categories of persons and the bhikkhu, at least in the eyes of Theravada Buddhists, is one of status. Just as the lay person is significant to the nun or monk as a source of material well being, so the monk or nun is significant to the lay person as representing a set of idealised spiritual aspirations. The dependency inherent in mendicancy does not confer low status or powerlessness on the monks and nuns. On the contrary their status and influence are high. In South East Asia the monks are publicly venerated to a degree that Western bhikkhus can find strange and overwhelming. Discussing his experience of being called upon to perform ceremonies for lay people in Sri Lanka a British Buddhist, now disrobed, told me:

> "It can throw you right off balance. You feel very unworthy, thinking they shouldn't ask me to do this. I am just a crazy Westerner - this is Asian tradition. But you cut through those feelings. You decide that it is <u>dukkha</u> and look for its origins."

Western lay people who visit Theravada monasteries in South East Asia are not always familiar with the finer points of the respect relationship. Looking back on several years spent in Thai monasteries an American bhikkhu said:

> "There is a whole body language that we don't have a clue about in the West. Say for example, if you were in the situation of coming to a monastery [in Thailand]. Well the way that you would behave around the monks would be a whole physical body language expression of reverence, so you wouldn't get too near. If you did you would lower yourself and hold you hands in <u>añjali</u> when you were speaking. The whole physical expression would

> be one of reverence and respect. If you contrast that to a Westerner who comes and doesn't have a clue, and does all the things that are not generally done in terms of body language that would be disrespectful - disrespectful in terms of body language perhaps, but genuine in the heart."

In the opinion of this monk Wat Pah Nanachat (the International Monastery founded by Ajahn Chah's Western disciples) acted as a "bridge between the two cultures."

In Britain the respect that is shown to monks takes on necessarily different forms. We have seen from Ven Amaro's account of his walk through Salford that British bhikkhus may encounter jeers and ridicule. The monks and nuns are most exposed when travelling. Otherwise time spent with non-Buddhists is likely to be in response to invitations and in the company of people who consciously grant "the robe" a certain respect, out of conformity to the bhikkhus' feelings or from a general religious sensitivity. People in these settings may not bow, or make <u>añjali</u> when talking to the monks, but they may well adopt more reserved and circumspect behaviour. I have noticed that on such occasions the monks retain their upright bearing and deliberate, collected movements, as well as their own etiquette; so that for example a junior monk holds back from talking and allows the senior monk to lead the conversation.

This last point was emphasised to me when I was about to join a group of nuns in visiting a lay person. It was carefully explained that I should allow the senior nun to do most of the talking. The more junior nuns would say less. I should be discrete and not chat freely as I had done on

another occasion. All this, as I recall, was told to me with such exquisite politeness that I much regret not having a verbatim account. I do however have a quotation from "A Lay Buddhist's Guide to the Monks' Code of Conduct" which conveys something of the same tone. Prior to setting out "minor rules of etiquette," such as not "looming over a bhikkhu," there is the following preamble.

> "Vinaya also extends into the realm of convention and custom. Such observances that it mentions are not 'rules' but skilful means of manifesting beautiful behaviour. In monasteries, there is some emphasis on such matters as a means of establishing harmony, order and pleasant relationships within a community. Lay people may be interested in applying such conventions for their own training in sensitivity, but it should not be considered something that is necessarily expected of them." [17]

The explanation of the preferred etiquette takes the form not of a series of rules, but as an invitation for lay people to join with the Vinaya for the sake of their own training. The notion of the Sangha as a means for lay people to make merit is diminished in favour of encouragement for lay people to "train" and to cultivate their "sensitivity" along the lines of the monks' Vinaya. This acknowledgement of shared spiritual endeavour does not infringe the distinction between monastics and lay people. There is nevertheless a strong feeling of the interdependency of the whole. Speaking of the range of respect behaviours that obtain between seniors and juniors, monks and nuns, monastics and lay people a nun remarked: "We perform a beautiful dance together." This "dance" is partially choreographed

through attention to the "skilful" and "appropriate" use of speech as described in the following extract from an interview with a senior monk, Ajahn Sucitto. We were discussing the question of admonishment.

> Me: But there are only rules of admonishment from monks to monks.
>
> A.S.: Yes because that is all the Buddha set up. It is not up to us to start creating rules for lay people.
>
> Me: But what if they want to be able to talk to you in this sort of way.
>
> A.S.: They can do. Their Precept is Wrong Speech, but there is no rule. It might be useful, if the lay person has a particular thing in their mind, to look at what the Buddha's guidance on admonishment was. You have first of all to know in your heart whether you want to help that person, or whether you have a mind that is critical or malicious. You have to examine what is in yourself. Do you have a mind of friendliness towards this person? Do you know the facts? Do you know the Vinaya? Are you speaking at the right time? In other words, just because somebody is doing something you don't have to go at them, blam! You take leave. You say 'Excuse me. I would like to mention something to you.' This is the way that you do it. It is a humble way of doing it."

Mindfulness in the use of language, "guarding ones speech," is seen as a means for honesty and sincerity. If words are carefully chosen, and precautions are taken not to give offence, it is possible to speak the truth on any matter. This view is reflected in the fact that the monks are instructed not to prepare their talks to lay people, but simply to speak what is in their hearts and minds. Consequently, the talks are anecdotal and self-revealing with the monks freely discussing the difficulties and doubts they

themselves have faced. On one occasion at Amaravati I witnessed the most senior monk resident in the monastery at the time settle down to give an evening desanā. He began with a few conventional thoughts about the aspirations of the Buddhist life, and then stopped abruptly. There was a long pause. He rearranged himself in the high seat on which he sat cross-legged and straightened his robes. These long pauses are usual and the listeners patiently wait on them. But this time the pause went on for several minutes. Eventually the Ajahn drew audible breath and spoke again, hesitantly at first and then more surely: "What I have just said is not what I want to say. It is just a formula." Taking the assembly of monastics and lay people into his confidence, he then went on to talk openly about the depression and doubt that he was currently facing.

Time and again in desanās I have heard monks talk about their resistance to the discipline under which they live and how small things trigger unreasonable levels of irritation: the way a person eats, or the way another sniffs loudly through a meditation sitting and so on. Accounts of these petty annoyances, and the way they proliferate in the mind, are given as illustrations of how the mind creates its own discontents and illusory states. Blissful states are shown equally to have negative results if the meditator attaches to them. Ajahn Sumedho gave this account of his experience:

> "You notice that religious people have insights, and they get very glassy-eyed. Born-again Christians are just aglow with this fervour. Very impressive too! I must admit, it's very impressive to see people so radiant. But in Buddhism, that state is called

> 'saññavipallāsa' - 'meditation madness.' When a good teacher sees you're in that state, he puts you in a hut out in the woods and tells you not to go near anyone! I remember I went like that in Nong Khai, the first year before I went to Ajahn Chah, I thought I was fully enlightened, just sitting there in my hut. I knew everything in the world, understood everything. I was just so radiant...but I didn't have anyone to talk to. I couldn't speak Thai, so I couldn't go and hassle the Thai monks. But the British Consul from Vientiane happened to come over one day, and somebody brought him to my hut...and I really let him have it, double barrelled! He sat there in a stunned state, and, being English he was very, very, very polite, and every time he got up to go I wouldn't let him. I couldn't stop, it was like Niagara Falls, this enormous power coming out, and there was no way I could stop myself. Finally he left, made an escape somehow: I never saw him again. I wonder why?" [18]

Large numbers of desanās by Ajahn Sumedho and other senior monks are recorded onto cassettes and are available on loan to lay people. Others are printed in books for free distribution and the cost covered by lay donations. Frequently the donors are Buddhists of South or South East Asian origin and the book dedicated to deceased relatives. When so many lay Buddhists live at a distance from their nearest monastery the tapes and books are a vital channel through which they can "receive the teaching."

So far I have concentrated on three special functions that are assigned to language within the monastery. Firstly language is a vehicle for teaching Dhamma; secondly it is a tool for social harmony; and thirdly is a means of personal development through mindful reflection on the Precept of Right, as opposed to Wrong, Speech. A fourth factor entails the use of the Pali language. Thai words are rarely used,

but reference to Pali terms is common. Their use links the British Theravada Buddhists to other Buddhists across the world. Ferguson explains the significance of the use of Pali among Buddhists:

> "When a Japanese Buddhist priest in a California Buddhist church recites a sutra in Pali with his English speaking congregation, this is a fine example of the spread of a particular language variety over enormous distances in space and time. When accounts of the Buddha and his sayings were collected and came to be accepted as the canon of the Buddhist scriptures, they were in a Middle Indo-Aryan language, Pali, whose exact provenience is not clear. When the Pali scriptures were used in worship in India and Ceylon, the language functioned as a special religious register in many speech communities where related Indo-Aryan languages were the worshippers' mother tongues. When Buddhism spread to areas such as Burma, Thailand, China and Japan, the sacred scriptures went along. Buddhist missionaries and scholars translated Pali and Sanskrit texts into other languages, but just about everywhere at least some uses of Pali were kept. In these new areas, the Pali language, still functioning as a religious register, was no longer related at all to the language of the worshippers, but retained its aura of sacredness." [19]

Initially the Western monks chanted in Pali only, now they chant in both Pali and English. Few lay people learn Pali, and most of the monks are not competent to read the canon in Pali without the help of a translation. Pali does however provide a large bank of technical terms to do with meditation, ethics and the maintenance of Vinaya. Although words such as dukkha, kamma, and ānāpānasati are part of the common parlance of lay people, a wider range of Pali terms are more likely to be used by monks and nuns. Pali features as the language in which the lay people proclaim the Precepts

and the Refuges and request a desana. Sometimes lay people join with the monks in sections of the morning and evening chanting for which purpose a special book is provided. At this early stage in the history of the Theravada Sangha in Britain it is impossible to gauge the likelihood of the continuous and frequent use of Pali, but the innovation of the monks performing some of the chanting (Pali - paritta) in English is a significant one. In Asia monks do not chant in Sinhala, Thai or Burmese, but only in Pali, the sacred language.

The magico-religious perspective is almost entirely absent in the British context, although the monks are sometimes asked to dedicate their chanting to "the benefit" of a named person who is seriously ill or recently deceased. Generally though the magico-religious aspect of the paritta chanting is played down and an articulation of the teaching emphasised. Hence the move towards chanting in English. This does not however imply the monks' preoccupation with written texts. The British Sangha focus on practice rather than scholarly hermeneutics.

Ideology, Language and Practice in the FWBO

Apart from one or two notable exceptions, such as the translator and writer Maurice Walshe, a great deal more time and effort is spent on studying Pali and Sanskrit scriptures among members of the FWBO than is generally the case among Theravada Buddhists in Britain. In the FWBO study is

formally organised and structured through study groups, the Mitra study course and specially produced literature.

During the mid 1980s Devamitra, the overall Mitra Convener reorganised and systematised the Mitra study course. He described the process as follows:

> "What happened was that when I first took this job on, I was going around the centres and talking with different groups of Mitras and I became aware of how little Dharma knowledge most of them possessed. In fact when I started to talk to Mitras about this a lot of them seemed very dissatisfied with the general approach to study and the level of study within the Movement, and felt that their study groups weren't helping them develop any real understanding of the Dharma. So I organised a couple of conferences with various Order Members, who were involved in study, and we discussed it and went away and thought about it and in the end I designed the present course. I tried to accommodate all the grievances that I had heard.
>
> "One was that the study wasn't really very demanding and that often it was unsystematic. So I designed a specific course. I organised nine lecture series given by Sangharakshita [on tape] in a rough order that would cover the three main stages of the development of Buddhism - Hinayāna, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. So it was progressive in the sense that the more basic and simpler material was dealt with in the earlier part of the course. I styled it a three year study course because I thought that was a reasonable period. It is one lecture a week that can vary between three quarters of an hour and an hour. The idea is that they should listen to that at home and take notes and come to the group with the questions and issues that they want to sort out each week. There is a course for study group leaders. There are two reading lists for the course. One is a short number of books that I would expect everyone to read. Then there is the recommended reading list. They are not expected to read all the titles on this list. It is just to bring these books to their attention."

The short reading list includes material by Sangharakshita and Subhuti, plus three Mahāyāna texts (The White Lotus Sutra, The Vimilakīrti Nirdeśa and The Sutra of the Golden Light). The general reading list covers a range of Pali and Mahāyāna texts in translation and works on the history and development of Buddhism by Edward Conze. A supplementary list features writings on evolutionary theory by Maynard Smith, and Richard Leakey, as well as works by Coleridge and Nietzsche and the historian Arnold Toynbee. A note warns that inclusion of a book on the list is not a guarantee that it may safely be "swallowed whole" and that "critical reading is required."

In addition to the weekly study sessions one weekend of each "term" is devoted to the study of a selected Pali text, and once a year the student is expected to "participate in a full length seminar" on a text considered suitable for each level of the course.

Responses to the intellectual challenge of the new course vary. Some Mitras with spare time and an aptitude for study complete it in less than the scheduled three years. For others following the course entails dogged determination. One Mitra who left elementary school at the age of fifteen and had no subsequent experience of study admitted that he did not complete all the projects in the course, but felt that despite the difficulties participation had sharpened his understanding of Buddhism.

The Mitra course is intended as an aid rather than a pre-requisite for ordination. New Order Members may or may not have completed it. According to Devamitra:

> "It is not a criterion. What we are looking for is spiritual commitment. You can't say that they must have done this, this and this. Because people can do all three right things for all the wrong reasons. It is very difficult to assess someone. You have to try to recognise their spiritual commitment. Presumably it is something that I feel in myself as a spiritually committed person. So I try to gauge and recognise that in someone else. It is not easy and we debate and talk about these sorts of things endlessly."

This picture of Order Members informally "debating" pertinent issues was frequently conjured in the interviews. The sense that Devamitra conveys of loosely organised processes of consultation and delegation appear to be characteristic of decision making processes within the Order. Talk is taken seriously in the FWBO. Writing of the Sixth Precept, the principal of abstention from frivolous speech, Sangharakshita says:

> "Speech can be truly meaningful only when life is meaningful and life can be meaningful only when we have a definite purpose and a definite goal. For a Buddhist this goal is Enlightenment, which means that for a Buddhist meaningful speech is speech about the Dharma, for it is the Dharma that is the means to Enlightenment." [20]

Describing how the purpose of the Mitra course did not reside merely in "academic study" an Order Member said that its real value lay "in getting together and talking things over with other people, group dynamics and developing friendships with others and having the Dharma as your point of contact."

For many this is a major factor in attracting them to the Movement. A recent Friend said:

> "One reason that I value the FWBO is that it presents an opportunity to talk and be with likeminded people. Ever since I went to the Centre I was with people that I could talk to, and not have to talk about football or what was on the telly last night. It isn't all deep conversation, but there are people to talk to."

Another described his second experience of a retreat as, " a chance to meet, laugh, talk, swop ideas and relax with intelligent people." Although on the surface this remark could refer to any holiday centred around a specialised shared activity or interest such as music or painting, when set beside the previous two quotations and much that has gone before, it becomes apparent that the speakers are referring to something more than the camaraderie of everyday life: something that is sociologically significant.

Victor Turner has written of the emergence within religious traditions of what he terms "counterparadigms," which in certain conditions become reabsorbed in the initial and central paradigm." [21] One example would be the mendicant Friars of the Middle Ages whose radicalism was eventually safely absorbed into mainstream Catholicism.

The existence of the FWBO may be seen as one such "counterparadigm," for while drawing eclectically on all schools of Buddhism it does not accept the institutional forms or practices of any. The exercise is to retrieve the "essence" of Buddhism and to develop institutional forms "suited" to modern conditions in the West. To that extent

its spokespersons assert a strong rejection of orthodox monastic Buddhism, particularly as it obtains within the Theravada. Furthermore the FWBO sets itself apart from other Buddhist groups in the West. According to Subhuti these groups are either "extensions of Eastern Buddhist culture into the West or they are intent on making weak and spurious parallels and accommodation with modern thinking - whether scientific or psychological." [22]

Turner maintains that essentially innovative religious groups, such as the FWBO, exemplify a modality of social relations which he defines as "communitas." [23] He identifies various types of communitas beginning with spontaneous communitas, where a grouping displays minimal formal organisation and hierarchical structures, and depends on the "direct immediate and total confrontation of human identities." [24] This description fits with what I have been able to discover about the FWBO in its formative period. Spontaneous communitas usually gives way to what Turner calls normative communitas, where "under the influence of time, the need to mobilize and organize resources to keep the members of a group alive and thriving, and the necessity for social control among those members in pursuance of these and other collective goals, the original existential communitas is organised into a perduring social system." [25]

Monasticism in Buddhism and Christianity provide examples of normative communitas,and are therefore not "the same as a structural group whose original raison d'etre was utilitarian, for normative communitas began with a non-

utilitarian experience of brotherhood and fellowship, the form of which the resulting group tried to preserve, in and by its religious and ethical codes and legal and political statutes and regulations." [26] Original qualities of *esprit de corps* may become subsumed by a developed legalism, but they remain as energising potentialities to be drawn upon, particularly at times of crisis or social change when adaptations are required in order to maintain institutional viability. Turner's theory of normative communitas helps to explain the resourcefulness and adaptability which I have suggested are characteristic of forest monks [Chapter Eight].

When it comes to the FWBO, which has been in existence for less than three decades, it is possible to trace the transitional process from spontaneous to normative commmunitas as it unfolds. For example the distinction that has arisen between senior Order Members and others and the regularising of relations between FWBO businesses and centres, the systematizing of the "ordination process" and so on. Even so within the Movement there remains a striking lack of regulation. During the period of the field-work the Order remained without any formal mechanism for expelling members. In 1990 Sangharakshita rather reluctantly removed from the list of members a handful who had remained out of contact for an extended period, while keeping open the possibility that they could return [27]. Control of conduct according to the constraints of the Ten Precepts depends upon peer group pressure affecting individual conscience. An Order Member said:

> "In practice people in the Order do things which are disapproved of by others and they carry on doing them, and there isn't necessarily any animosity. They won't be cast out. The important thing is that there has been openness and communication about what is going on and they have had to confront themselves about what they are doing."

Sometimes these kinds of negotiations fail and people leave simply because they no longer feel at home with the prevailing ambience. Subhuti talked in his interview about how the FWBO has no "institutional dimension apart from the head (Sangharakshita) and Chapters." I then asked if Subhuti expected the institutional dimension to expand. He replied:

> "Well that is a big debate that we are engaged in at the moment. For instance to what extent should we be centralised? Or to what extent should we allow individual chapters of the Order to ordain new Order Members themselves. At the moment we do not have a resolution, because if you centralise then you tend to ossify and you also tend to get alienation between the people in the field, as it were, and the centre. On the other hand if you just allow any group of ten Order Members to Ordain others, which is the traditional approach, you can get quite a dilution."

There is a reluctance to compromise the bonds of communitas which are a source of pride and part of the Movement's identity. And so I return to the point of departure for this discussion, which was the attraction to the style of "talk" and interaction that newcomers perceive as being available in the FWBO in contrast to the "ordinary" interactions of everyday life. Turner describes the qualities of the bonds of communitas as "undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, extant, non rational, existential, I-Thou relationships." Borrowing a phrase from Durkheim, he evaluates communitas as being "part of the serious life" (de

la vie sérieuse). [28] It is just this sense of interpersonal authenticity which my FWBO informants touch upon in a variety of references in this and previous chapters. Much FWBO literature and publicity material contrives to capture a similar sensibility with its confident, uncompromisingly optimistic, visionary tone apparent in such well worn phrases as "positive mental states," "human potential," "community life,". "spiritual friendship," "commitment," and "self-transcendence." The exuberant message is reinforced by the numerous photographs featuring groups of open faced, happy smiling people caught in various poses of togetherness, strewn across the pages of Golden Drum. The overall impression is that the practice of Buddhism leads to fresh, exhilarating and enduring forms of solidarity under the general rubric of Sangha.

The Two Sanghas Reconsidered

In terms of resources, affiliation, and rate of expansion, the two interpretations of the Buddhist concept of Sangha represented in this study cannot be said to outweigh one another. Each seems slowly to be moving forward, becoming more firmly established as each year passes. During the five year period I have been engaged in research both movements, the Theravada and the FWBO, have demonstrated growth and consolidation, taking their place in what seems like an increasingly pluralist religious culture. Religious seekers are no longer restricted even to a choice between Buddhism and other "world religions" with the major

alternatives being a variety of Christian denominations. Instead they can settle for one among several types of Buddhist practice. However, because I cannot comment on the stability or popularity of most of these alternatives, I will restrict the remainder of my remarks to apply only to my knowledge of the FWBO, and the Theravadin monastics and lay supporters. I very much hope that others working in the field of sociology of religion will direct their attention particularly to the Tibetan and Japanese Buddhist schools in Britain and elsewhere in Western countries, in order that our understanding of the total phenomena of Buddhism in the West will not remain partial.

Studying the transmission of Buddhism to the West, as it is actually taking place in the contemporary world, helps to sharpen our insights concerning the nature of Buddhism as a system of thought and action. One example from this present study would be the role adopted by charismatic forest monks in inaugurating a successful mission to the West. Remote forest hermitages may not have seemed the most obvious source for a mission which, having begun in Britain, is now spreading across the world. (Monasteries in Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland and Italy have been founded by disciples of Ajahn Sumedho and remain under his spiritual direction. Moves are afoot to found a monastery in the U.S.A.) The potency of forest monks as missionaries arises from the same features that connect them to revivalism and reform movements in the indigenous setting and for which ample evidence already exists. Once Westerners began to ordain as bhikkhus

in significant numbers they were prepared for their return to the West by the founding of Wat Pah Nanachat (the International Monastery). Here they cut their teeth in living together under Vinaya, rules rather than as random and occasional Westerners among Thai monks. No firm plan for a mission to the West was evolved, but according to the monks who were present at Wat Pah Nanachat in those early days Ajahn Chah was given to musing on the possibility. He was thus prepared and able to respond when the invitation from the West arrived through the English Sangha Trust. In Ajahn Sumedho Ajahn Chah had a trusty and capable Abbot, well trained in Vinaya and possessed in large measure with positive personal qualifications, not least his winning manner. The success of the mission provides a vivid illustration of the creative and generative processes that centre upon the radical renouncers of the Theravada.

A second perspective resulting from research into the transmission of Buddhism will help to shed light on the subject of cultural borrowing. There is in these pages a salutary warning about the intricacies of trans-cultural processes and their derivations. Certain conditions had to be met in both the indigenous setting and the host setting before a Theravada Sangha could be fully imported into Britain. In several ways what has put down roots here is a reconstituted Sangha, not only in the sense that the monks are Westerners, but also in reference to modern reforms in Thailand, the lay meditation movement in Burma and Sri Lanka and the "nuns'" movement in Sri Lanka.

In Britain an atomised and pluralist post-war society became ever more subjective and oriented to the inner life of the individual. Eventually techniques originating in academic and clinical psychology to do with self-awareness and self-cultivation came to be assimilated and adapted in a variety of quarters. By the 1970s the notion of "consciousness raising" was associated with personal morality leading to ideas about the connection between "personal politics" and collective responsibility as articulated in the feminist and gay liberation movements and by sections of the environmental movement. Ideas and techniques for self-improvement exploded at a popular level. A range of therapeutic cults and self-exploration and self-improvement systems were imported into Britain largely from the United States, and training in interpersonal skills and self-management appeared as part of the syllabus in schools and colleges.

Carrithers has demonstrated that as far back as the nineteenth century there is evidence to show that in a European context Buddhism is most readily accessible where an ethos of self-cultivation is operational [29]. Carrithers' essay is essentially a reorientation and expansion of ideas regarding the history of the notion of the self, which may in a particular culture, at a specific point in the history of a society, give rise to considerable individualism. Moreover notions of the self enjoy a relatively wide distribution and relative autonomy that views of the person enjoy.

As a device for avoiding the particular cultural values and significances with which the terms self and person are laden, Carrithers chooses to substitute two terms of art - *moi* and *personne*. Both these notions, he suggests, are not "detached from life" but are embedded not only in texts but also in actions and practices of those who hold them." [30] Carrithers shows how conceptions of *moi* were embodied in this way in the life and work of the German Anton Gueth, later known by his Pali name of Nyanatiloka. Gueth's journey from well educated Catholic boy to Buddhist monk and scholar exemplifies and parallels developments of certain conceptions of moi. Some of these developments took place in the discourse of intellectual history which is "irreducible to social history." [31] Others can be traced to the particular setting of cosmopolitan bourgeois Germany - "with its small states and consequent vision of the world." [32] Gueth was influenced by a *moi* theory partly created by Goethe, where the search for the absolute as a religious ideal involves an inward impulse leading to the sacralising of the self, its inner working, its relationship with fellow selves, and its relationship with an overarching cosmos which, at this juncture of German history, was going over from a Christian spiritual order to an increasingly pagan natural order.

Gueth read and was influenced by the German Romantics, as well as being influenced by the popular moraliser Dr. Feuchtersleben, who advocated moral hygiene based on self-cultivation.

In Buddhism, Gueth, as Nyanatiloka, was able to locate a naturalistic view of the psychophysical individual embodied in the principles of dependent origination that were, under the circumstances, plausible. He was able to render this view with meticulous orthodoxy into a European language and a European idiom of Buddhist thought. I would contend that in our own post-Freudian culture conceptions of *moi* which locate the individual as the "chief area of philosophical concern" are probably even more widely distributed than they were in nineteenth-century Germany. Indeed, the notion of self-help and self-development is paradoxically now a basis for the creation of collectivities and institutions. People seek to share their aspirations for the *moi* and combine in mutual self-help groups. Both the Buddhist movements in this study could be described as religious self-help groups and strictly in this sense they both approximate to the early Buddhist Sangha.

Another characteristic which both groups share, in different ways, with the ancient Indian Sangha is their stress on the universalism of the Buddha's teaching, which is for all people at all times. The Buddha lived in a society where occupational specialisation, diversification and urbanisation was replacing an older, less complex social order. The Buddha spoke to his time by addressing everyone, and his converts included princes and criminals. Although in its spread eastwards across Asia Buddhism was adopted as a civic religion in various locations the universalistic strand was nowhere entirely abandoned in favour of purely

particularistic interpretations. In a long article examining popular Thai texts and four commonly visited Buddhist centres, Reynolds concludes that there is a "persisting polarity between the universalistic and the more particularistic orientations" in many areas of contemporary Buddhist life [33]. The universalist message is an imperative for those already in possession of Buddha-Dhamma to share its benefits and for those who receive it to attend. It is the one essential element for cross-cultural transmission and understanding, though the remainder may be variable. It is unambiguously stated in the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, among the most famous and popular of the Pali suttas, here translated into English by Nanamoli Thera:

> "When the Wheel of Truth had thus been set rolling by the Blessed One the earth-gods raised the cry: 'At Benares in the Deer Park at Isipatana, the matchless Wheel of Truth has been set rolling by the Blessed One, not to be stopped by monk or divine or god or death-angel or high divinity or anyone in the world." [34]

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